

MATERIA CRITICA  
GEORGE JEAN NATHAN







MATERIA CRITICA

# THE BOOKS OF GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

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## *The Theatre*

COMEDIANS ALL  
THE POPULAR THEATRE  
MR. GEORGE JEAN NATHAN PRESENTS  
ANOTHER BOOK ON THE THEATRE  
THE THEATRE, THE DRAMA, THE GIRLS  
THE CRITIC AND THE DRAMA  
MATERIA CRITICA

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BOTTOMS UP

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HELIOGABALUS (*in collaboration with H. L. Mencken*)

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INTERPRETATION OF THE NATIONAL MIND (*in collabora-  
tion with H. L. Mencken*)

## *Travel and Reminiscence*

EUROPE AFTER 8:15 (*in collaboration with H. L. Mencken*)

## *Art and Life*

THE WORLD IN FALSEFACE

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# MATERIA · CRITICA

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GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

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New York ALFRED · A · KNOPF Mcmxxiv

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## CRITIC AND CRITICISM



## § 1

As a critic, it has never been my aim or purpose to convince anyone, including myself. My sole effort has been to express personal opinions grounded upon such training and experience and the philosophy deduced therefrom as I may possess. Since I personally am not fool enough to believe finally in everything that I happen at the moment to believe, however stoutly, I am not fool enough to wish to convince anyone finally in matters that, at their very best, are in all probability of a dubious truth. I please myself to believe that the critic who has another aim is a vainglorious and often absurd figure. One is a good critic in the degree that one is able to answer vacillating and quibbling doubt with determined and persuasively positive doubt. Criticism is the prevailing of intelligent skepticism over vague and befuddled prejudice and uncertainty. It answers no riddle: it merely poses an oppugnant and contradictory riddle. When the critic ceases to have self-doubts, he ceases to be a critic and becomes a pedagogue.

## § 2

There are critics whose taste is sound, but whose judgment is unsound: who like the right things, but for the wrong reasons. There are other critics whose judgment is sound, but whose taste is defective: these like the right things and for the correct reasons, but the absence of background of taste and depth of taste alienates their followers. There are still other critics who are forthright apostles of emotional reaction, who have but a small measure of taste and utterly no judgment: these are ever the most popular critics, since they deal in the only form of criticism that the majority of persons can quickly and most easily grasp.

## § 3

It is one of the defects of the critical biology that criticism seeks to account for everything in the work of an artist, to plumb it thoroughly, estimate it and reason it out. In this, criticism often over-reaches itself. There are things in the work of the true artist, of the man of genius, that he himself cannot account for and reason out, that appear in his work unconsciously, bafflingly, without meditated cause, and they are often the finest things in that work. What is the human

soul? No critic knows. What are certain of those elements that comprise the soul of a work of art? No critic can tell. It is not the duty of criticism futilely to explore such mysteries; it is the duty of criticism merely to announce them and venerate them.

#### § 4

Great criticism is the child not of tractable presumption but of strong prejudice. The prejudices of one generation are the faiths of the next. The path to sound credence is through the thick forests of skepticism.

#### § 5

It is the dodge of a certain type of critic to seek to conceal his own deficiencies—biological, personal, professional and artistic—by attributing them to the person whose work he is criticizing.

#### § 6

There is no such thing as absolutely unimpeded, clear, straightforward thinking. The greatest and most concentrated mind in the world, pondering a problem, will find itself periodically invaded, if

but for a fleeting moment, by recalcitrant and irrelevant thoughts—of a bird perched upon the window-sill, of a moist eye-glass, of some object upon the writing desk, of a sore tooth, of a pretty girl it met last summer—of something alien and corruptive. The strong chain of thinking is made up of the links of many loose thoughts.

### § 7

The world is run not by thought but by opinion.

### § 8

The critic who is expert in the manipulation of logic appreciates the infinitely superior value of the tricky and specious argument as opposed to the simple and sound one. Sound arguments, in the assault of logic upon the herd head, are doomed to more or less dismal failure. If the mob is to be persuaded, it must be persuaded by suave chicane containing a mere slight, jazzy counterpoint of logic—hard logic, stripped to the buff, can accomplish nothing. What the mass of the public wants is not constructive evidence, tough facts and straight-line reasoning, but evidential sky-rockets, pin-wheels and flower-pots. The critic of the arts, if he be of the species that

wishes to convert his readers to his way of thinking—if he be, in other words, idiotically imbued with the messiah-pox—must conduct himself much the same as a propagandist in wartime. He must lie convincingly; he must deftly distort the facts; he must perform elaborately as a country fair hypnotist performs; but he must not permit himself to be found out. His criticism must be a shrewd, deceptive, plausible and irresistibly glib amalgam of æsthetic gold bricks, spook photography, death-bed visions, covered carpet tacks and Hindoo mango-tree growing set into a frame of substantial but mild and very easily assimilable dialectics. The so-called influential critic is not the critic who tells the truth as he sees it in terms of the truth, but more often the one who tells the truth as he sees it in terms of the truth as others see it. He may write what he believes, but he is careful first to filter it through the minds of those whom he is addressing. This is the “as we all well know,” “as you will surely agree,” “those of us who,” “as for the rest of us,” type of critic. One finds him everywhere. He is the critical go-getter, good mixer, back-slapper. And, like a competent shoe drummer, he gets what he goes after.

In the matter of the value of the showy argument as against the sound, I am ever reminded of

a murder trial that I covered about nineteen years ago in a little town in New Jersey. A physician was charged with having killed his wife by giving her drugs whose action and effect were indistinguishable from those of ptomaine poisoning. Things looked pretty bad for the defendant and, up to the time the counsel for the defense began its cross-examination of the star witness for the State, the odds were heavy on the man's conviction for murder in the first degree. The testimony of the star witness for the prosecution had dangerously riddled the defensive armor. This witness had previously sworn that he, a stranger in the little town, had arrived in the town on the night of the alleged murder. It was the first time he had ever been in the little town. He had left the next morning and had not been back since summoned as a witness by the prosecution. On the night in question, he testified, he had got off the train at the dépôt and had walked up the main street of the town and gone directly to the accused's house. If the defense could shoot a hole through this testimony, it well appreciated that it would go a long way toward convincing the jury of the innocence of its client.

Among the four attorneys for the accused was a little, richly bewhiskered, taciturn yokel of some fifty years who, it had been observed, hadn't so

much as opened his mouth once since the beginning of the trial. None of the newspapermen present could solve the mystery of his presence; he seemed a sheer wanton waste of good money on the part of the defendant. The cross-examination of the important star witness for the State proceeded —the usual questionings and re-questionings. These all centered upon his presence in the little town on the night in point. The cross-examination had been going on for about five weary hours when suddenly the little bewhiskered yokel lawyer who hadn't thus far spoken a single word hopped to his feet, brushed back the other attorneys for the defense, and approached the man in the witness box.

“You say that you got out at the dépôt and walked directly up the main thoroughfare of this city to the defendant's residence?” he inquired.

The witness nodded.

“Well, then,” asked the little lawyer, “tell the gentlemen of the jury what you saw when you walked up the main thoroughfare.”

The witness, somewhat perplexed, replied that he had seen nothing.

“What, nothing!” exclaimed the little lawyer.  
“You saw *nothing*?”

“Nothing,” answered the witness.

“Do you mean to say that you can face the jury

and deliberately say that you saw nothing"—here the little lawyer paused dramatically—"nothing *unusual*?"

The witness, nonplussed, again made negative answer.

The little lawyer turned to the jury:

"You have heard the witness say, gentlemen of the jury, that he walked up the main street of our city and yet saw absolutely nothing in the least unusual. I ask you, gentlemen, can you therefore for one moment believe that this witness has told the truth and that he actually was in our city on the night he says he was? You certainly cannot. For if he had been here and had, as he says, walked up the main thoroughfare he could not possibly—he could not *conceivably*—have missed seeing the fine new three-story school-building which we have recently erected!"

The jury, composed of villagers who had paid out their good taxes for the little school-building and were immensely proud of it as one of the real sights of their little town, smiled back their agreement. Their eventual verdict—a unanimous one—was not guilty.

### § 9

The stage is not the place for consistent and resolute intelligence. The stage is the place,

rather, for a deft and sagaciously deceptive simulacrum of intelligence.

### § 10

Criticism in America has always suffered from ward politics.

### § 11

There is a type of comedy that the professional critic enjoys thoroughly while he is in the theatre—in fact, smiles and chuckles and laughs heartily at—and the next day attempts to prove to himself is not the sort of comedy which he should enjoy thoroughly while he is in the theatre and smile and chuckle and laugh heartily at. I have never been able, like certain of my estimable colleagues, to convince myself that what has made me laugh between nine and eleven o'clock at night is really, if only I thought about it between nine and eleven the following morning, very inferior stuff indeed. The best joke in the world, if pondered for a sufficient space of time, turns out to be pretty gloomy, yet that is nothing against it as a joke. It may be the same with the amusing dialogue of transient comedy. The man who would criticize his own laughter would criticize his own prayers.

## § 12

It is frequently said that revolt is ever the distinguishing characteristic of the Younger Generation. This is only half true. The Younger Generation in any double decade or of any century merely talks and writes of revolt. The actual revolting is generally done by the Older Generation. The Younger Generation may be found atop the soap-boxes, but the bricks and loaded guns are usually found in the hands of their elders.

## § 13

I was asked recently what I, who had set down in one of my books that pleasure was after all my chief concern in life, considered pleasure. The answer seemed very easy—until I started to make it. For before the first word of a reply emerged from my mouth, I appreciated that here was a poser. What I considered pleasure at the moment, I knew full well I might not consider pleasure as little as an hour later. Pleasure wears a multi-colored coat which it is forever turning inside out. It is capricious, inconstant, vexatious. For example, though I consider it a pleasure to drink a cocktail before dinner, I certainly do not

list under the heading of pleasure the drinking of a cocktail, equally meritorious, before breakfast. If I find pleasure in a woman's company at twilight, I find none in a woman's company at high noon. An ocean voyage is a pleasure to me in warm weather; in cold weather I would as lief shoot myself. There is no such phenomenon as a constant, definite, pleasure-giving thing. Pleasure is a matter of shifting prejudices and moods. I find pleasure in reading, but sometimes I find only agony in reading. I find pleasure in writing, yet often rather than sit down to writing I would go out and shovel coal. Imagine getting pleasure out of Schubert with a cold in one's head! Although music is one of my greatest pleasures, at such a time I can get a hundred-fold pleasure out of a ten-cent tube of menthol. The theatre is a source of infinite pleasure to me, but I would not go to see "Hamlet" in July for a barrel of Nuits St. Georges. . . .

#### § 14

The trouble with the majority of American journalistic critics of drama and literature is that, while they know *what* they like, they do not know *why* they like it.

## § 15

There is no more absurd critic than the one who coincidentally admires Walter Pater's prose and disesteems mere rhythm in music.

## § 16

One of our esteemed weeklies has been publishing a series of articles written by various critics wherein the latter seek to analyze themselves that their followers may know what manner of men they are and the nature of the fonts of viewpoint and prejudice from which their judgments spring. An excellent editorial idea, but of little actual soundness or value, and this despite the various critics' unquestionable honesty in setting down the personal facts and deductions requested of them. It is next to impossible for any critic thoroughly to analyze himself fairly and squarely, that is, for any critic of the first grade. The first-rate critic may know himself in a vague way, and may be able to record that vagueness in terms of a deceptive literality and plausibility, but most of the qualities that go to make him the first-rate critic that he is inevitably elude his plumbing, for all its sincerity. One observes that, in every one of the self-exposés, the critic under his own micro-

scope attempts to view himself through the eye not of a critic but through the eye of his lay reader, which is a very different thing. He presents the picture of himself not in terms of himself so much as in terms of that part of himself that is the normal, average man. He apologizes for those qualities in himself that differentiate him from the normal, average man. Which constitutes a document approximately as valuable as a treatise by a normal, average man outlining those qualities and prejudices and points of view of his own that differ from those of the first-rate critic.

Usually when a critic essays self-analysis he misses the real point of himself for the simple reason that neither he, nor anyone else, knows what it is. It is as impossible accurately to define the quality that makes the first-rate critic as it is to define the quality that makes the first-rate musician, or painter, or sculptor. It is easy to speak of intelligence, culture, background, experience, sympathy, sensitiveness, originality and so on, but these are merely rubber-stamps, merely words. There have been critics possessed of all these qualities who have been second-rate critics. There have been critics who have possessed few of these qualities who have been first-rate critics. Great criticism is the product of a species of sleight-of-mind that tricks the most seeing eye and is to no

little degree inexplicable. The critic of the Hoboken *Ünkleblatt* may be able to lay bare the secrets of his personal craft and of his immortal soul, but Coleridge would be unable to if he tried a thousand years. The great critic no more knows why he is great than a seven-year-old chess prodigy knows why he is the expert that he happens to be. It is only the critics of the lower level who know why they are on that level. It is easier for men to know why they fail than for men to know why they succeed. Genius is ever a complete stranger to itself. It is reserved for mere talent alone to comprehend its loves and its hates.

### § 17

The mob thinks in terms of that one of its members who has the loudest voice and the softest head.

### § 18

The dramatic critic who concerns himself primarily and elaborately with the actor as opposed to the drama is himself usually something of an actor at heart. He may not always be conscious of the fact, but his readers to a very considerable degree are. They can detect him in the writing

act of listening to the sound of his own words, of rolling them with relish upon his tongue, of seeking to make theatrical and magnificently effective literary gestures, and of aiming for the reciprocal applause of those actors about whom he writes. He is what may be called the stage-door John type of critic, baffled and defeated in his subconscious wish to be an actor and waiting, flowers in hand, for one more successful, who is himself in the body of another, to come out.

### § 19

There is a type of critic who thinks primarily in terms of literary composition. When he sits down to record his findings he concerns himself not with recording his findings so much as with recording his own talent as a writer of prose. What results is neither criticism nor literature. The one gobbles up the other. All that remains is literature invalidated by propaganda and propaganda invalidated by literature.

### § 20

Sound criticism and one's wayward personal tastes are at times—for all we hear profoundly to the contrary—of a brilliant and even startling

dissociative action. For example, I doubt that even I have friends fool enough to believe against me for a moment that I consider Sacha Guitry a greater dramatist than Ibsen, yet I am free to confess that when I go to the theatre I would three times rather see a play by the former than one by the latter. In the same way, though they are obviously not even remotely comparable, I would rather see Margaret Simms, the colored girl of "Liza," dance than Adeline Genée. And I am made to laugh louder by the comedic technic of George Bickel than by that of the immeasurably superior John Drew.

The defective art of personal taste is thus often caught in the professional act of handing over its sword to the art of criticism on the field of an aesthetic Appomattox. We are, all of us, the geniuses of our dislikes. All criticism is, to a greater or lesser degree, a convincing and indisputable lie. It is well for the staunchest believers in the theories of the world's greatest critics that they are not too familiar with the secret autobiographies of those critics. I should hate to have observed the Schumann of "Eusebius" listening to Paul Whiteman; I should hate to have introduced Dante to Peggy Joyce. . . .

## § 21

Ever since that night twenty-six years ago when some idiot of a London theatrical manager sought to persuade Bernard Shaw that, when he came to his theatre for reviewing purposes, he ought to have manners enough to lay aside his daytime tweeds and get himself up like a swell-elegant stockbroker, there has persisted between managers and critics a difference of opinion as to the ethics of the business of passing upon plays. The managers' bill of complaint is a long one. It ranges all the way from protesting against a reviewer's impudence in assuming that he can intelligently pass judgment upon a masterpiece like "Abie's Irish Rose" when he very plainly has had a snifter, to protesting indignantly at the same reviewer's leaving the same play in the middle of the second act and making up his mind about it without waiting to see how it comes out. Since lately a certain trace of irascibility has here and there crept into the managers' tone, it may not be amiss for one of the critical gentry to undertake a look into the various writs and replevins.

Perhaps the most common complaint of the managers is directed against the habit of this or that reviewer in deserting his seat before the play is over. The managers argue that the reviewer is

in the position of an invited guest, and should conduct himself accordingly. So far, so good. But is it not also true that, if the reviewer is in the position of an invited guest and must conduct himself accordingly, the manager is no less in the position of the inviting host and must similarly conduct *himself* accordingly? If a man invites me to his house to dinner and then gives me no dinner, can he expect me patiently to hang around until eleven o'clock with my mouth open? He certainly cannot. Nor can a manager who invites me to see a substantial play and then gives me only a cheap piece of fluff. The critic who cannot accurately and finally judge of the quality of a play after the curtain has been up twenty minutes is a rank incompetent. There never lived a dramatist who did not establish or disestablish his right to be listened to respectfully in his first three pages of typewritten copy. If a play's first act reveals a puerile point of view and a paltry skill at dramatic composition there isn't a Chinaman's chance that the second act will contain a single solitary thing to interest any half-way intelligent and cultivated auditor. And for the critic who nonsensically remains for that act to remain also for the act beyond is an unmistakable mark of the critic's complete dotage. Recently, for example, I was invited by the management to pass critical opinion

upon a certain play. The first act of the play was utter drivel without a single redeeming quality, and I left. But, obscene curiosity in a certain direction overtaking me, I retraced my footsteps and stood in the rear promenade to watch those of my colleagues who strangely believed it to be their duty to continue to squat in the hope that the piffle might suddenly and miraculously be converted into resplendent genius. There sat the venerable critic for the *Evening Post* in scholarly and profound contemplation of the cheese dish, for all the world as if it were a work of the first importance and as if the fate of nations hung upon the equity of his next day's verdict. A man of three score and ten, a man of fifty years' service in play reviewing, presenting the pitiable spectacle of soberly wasting his precious time over something that any college boy could hit off at nine o'clock as inimitable and unmitigated trash! And some of the others. There, too, they rested their Penthesilean breeches in an elaborately prolonged professorial appraisal of the trumpery stage traffick. A juicy sight! I put on my hat and went again into the night, ruminating upon the infinite humor of the Divine Maker.

The critic who comes to review a play, the managers further contend, should be in his chair promptly at the time the curtain has been an-

nounced to rise, and should be sensitive enough to punctilio to embellish his person with the gauds prescribed by the social code. Why, pray? Although I myself am invariably in my seat at the stipulated time, I know that by this act I am setting a very bad example, and one that works a deal of damage to the theatre as an institution. The theatre is, first and foremost, a place of pleasure. To demand that a pleasure-seeker—and a critic is as much a pleasure-seeker as any other theatre-goer; if he is not, he is by way of being a bad critic—to demand that this pleasure-seeker conduct himself precisely after a kind of absolute train schedule is disastrously, at the very outset, to invade his pleasure mood. Pleasure cannot be run by rules. To tell a man that his good time must begin at 8:15 P. M. sharp, and that if it doesn't begin exactly at that minute it can't begin at all, is to treat him as if he were a jail-bird. If a theatregoer wants to come into a theatre at 8:30 or 9 or 9:30 or even 10 o'clock, I can't see that it is anybody's business but his own. One cannot cater to a man's entertainment by asking him to punch a time-clock. The critic, of course, unlike the lay playgoer, has a duty to perform. But duty may often best be performed if it is viewed more as a pleasure than as a job. The police force of New York City became corrupt and in-

efficient the day that some official thick-neck decided that it would be a great thing to make the men give patrol box rings back to the station houses at specified periods showing that they were where they were supposed to be at the moment they were supposed to be there. The most successful factory in America has a standing rule that the first efficiency expert or "system" impresario who shows up shall promptly be booted in the pantaloons. . . . Show me the critic who is late in arriving for the play of a Hauptmann or someone like him and I'll show you a monkey. Show me one who is on time for the play of a Broadway hack and I'll show you a transcendental jackass.

The question of dress is even more nonsensical. The theatre is no more a social institution than the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. There is no more sound reason why a man should dress for the theatre if he doesn't wish to than there is for him to dress for a trip to Coney Island. To doll one's self up for a view of one of the innumerable gems of, say, Mr. Samuel Shipman, is like appearing at Buckingham Palace in a blue shirt. If the managers hold that it is a question of invitation in the case of a professional critic, and that the critic should therefore pursue the social amenities associated with an invitation, then the obvious

reply is that so is a pig-roast a matter of invitation. The circumstance that certain managers hold their pig-roasts at night has nothing whatsoever to do with the case. There are occasions, frequent enough, when one dresses for the theatre, but these occasions are those when the theatre somewhat ostentatiously and not a little ridiculously decides that it will for the evening be a social function. The theatre is always a trifle silly at these times, like a newly rich pork packer who puts on spats and takes up French. It fills its seats with a lot of rich Wall Street Jews (who are driven to regard the theatre and the opera house as social quarters by virtue of barriers set up against them in more private and exclusive guilds), a somewhat lesser number of *Social Register* pushers, and a few eminent visiting foreign firemen, and then has the impertinence to expect a man with some taste, decorum and sense to stand in front of his pier glass for an hour and make himself similarly gaudy in order to reduce himself to a level with these absurd nincompoops. That I, for example, often so pretty myself up on such occasions is surely no tribute to my good manners and gentlemanliness, and most certainly not to my respect for the profession of dramatic critic, but rather a mark of cheap affectation that seeks, by so uniforming itself, to avoid conspicuousness and, in

the avoiding, makes its entrepreneur no better than the swine he affects to spit upon.

When a respectable critic accepts tickets from a manager to review a play, he is under no obligations to the manager other than to review the play as he sees fit to review it, and in the way and after the manner of conduct to which he is peculiarly accustomed. Were it my familiar practise to review plays lying flat upon the floor and attired in the costume of a Big Indian Chief, I don't quite see how any manager could rightfully object to me, provided that I didn't light a pipe and break the fire laws. The manager, true enough, might argue that the floor was no place from which properly to see his play, but that would depend entirely, first, upon the play and, secondly, upon the relative eloquence and persuasiveness of his own and the critic's philosophy in the matter. The ethics of play reviewing, in short, are by no means arbitrary. They may vary with different critics as those critics differ from one another. If Mr. Arthur Bingham Walkley elects to show up in a pearl gray derby hat, a yellow sweater and green knickerbockers and, once seated, feels disposed to review the play in point with his feet resting atop the chair in front of him, I can see no cause for complaint on the part of the manager, save Mr. Walkley's brogans be of such amplitude

as to obscure the view of the stage from the person or persons sitting behind him. But if, on the other hand, the third-rate critic of some second-rate journal were to show up in the same regalia and were to do the same thing, I can see no other course for the manager than to take the fellow by the ear, lead him politely to the rear aisle, and lock him up in the lavatory until the play is over.

The managers are also heard occasionally to grumble over the habit that certain critics have of carrying on conversations while the play is in progress. I have been going to the theatre professionally now for almost twenty years, yet in all that time I have never heard a reviewer, whether a competent or an incompetent one, utter a whisper during the course of a respectable stage exhibit. If what is transpiring on the stage is, on the other hand, negligible, there seems to me to be utterly no reason why a critic above the grade of moron should not be privileged to divert himself in any way he chooses. If he cares to divert himself by conversing with his companion, what business is it of the manager's? He disturbs the persons seated near him, says the manager. That depends. Let us say that the critic in point is Max Beerbohm, or Arthur Symons, or William Archer, or John Palmer, or our own H. T. Parker. Does the manager—since it is the theory of the thing

that we are discussing—seriously mean to contend that persons sitting near-by would not enjoy the conversation a whole lot more than they would the stage piffle? Personally, were I a lay theatre-goer, I should very gladly pay out my money even for a play by the late Charles Klein were I to anticipate that, sitting in front of me, I should find two intelligent critics who would keep up an interesting conversation throughout the performance and so pleasantly entertain me.

The managers have many valid complaints against the critics—I could readily give them a number that they themselves haven't thought of—but those that I have cited are far from well-grounded. Let them remember that when they complain against the manners of a critic who leaves a bad play before it is over, they complain analogously and ridiculously against the established and invariable manners of the King of England. Let them remember that when they complain against the ethics of a critic in carrying on a conversation during a piddling performance, they complain analogously and even more ridiculously against the ethics of the Supreme Court of the United States and the two Houses of Congress. And let them further remember that when they complain against the offense to *bienséance* on the part of critics who do not dress up for eventful

gatherings, they complain analogously, and very trenchantly, against the same shortcoming on the part of Jesus Christ.

### § 22

The tolerance of age, as opposed to the intolerance of youth, has its genesis less in the experience and maturity of the mind than in a keen sense of age's diminished personal qualities. Youth is sure of itself; it is sure of its strength, its beauty, its ability to tweak the world by the nose, its romantic devil-may-care heart. Age, with its increased wisdom, knows that these rare attributes are no longer its own proud possession. Its tolerance is thus less sympathy for other men than sympathy for itself. It is tolerant because it is mistrustful of itself, and a trifle afraid longer to risk intolerance. Only the strong may be intolerant. Tolerance is a product of the self-perceived inferiority complex of the weak. And age, for all the power of its mind, is weak in all those things that form in combination the basis of the vanity of mortal man.

### § 23

Criticism should be the art of separating the good from the bad and espousing the cause of the

good. Contemporary reviewing is more often the art of separating the good from the bad and espousing the cause of the bad.

### § 24

It is often argued against the dramatic critic that his judgment becomes warped through a surfeit of the theatre, that since he is compelled to go to play after play night after night that judgment, calloused through repetition and satiety, is bound to become unduly influenced and hence devitalized by the man's personal impatience, cumulatively blasé point of view and physical fatigue. This is nonsense. Were it true, the same argument might be applied with equal force against the reliability of the doctor, surgeon and criminal lawyer in constant practice. If my critical judgment and practising skill are corrupted by my being forced to sit successively through fifty idiotic plays, what of the critical judgment and practising skill of the doctor who is called upon successively to attend fifty women whose only trouble is that they do not love their husbands, of the surgeon who is forced successively to perform fifty minor operations in the region of the uropygium, and of the criminal lawyer who is compelled successively to defend fifty

plainly innocent clients against the spraying eloquence of some shyster prosecutor in a poke collar?

### § 25

It is the fashion of a certain school of criticism to attend an excellent music show, have an excellent good time at it, and then write a piece deplored the inconsequence of such entertainments. It is a process of ratiocination that, try as I will, I find myself unable to woo. The critic who cannot enjoy "Hamlet" one night and the "Follies" the next seems to me to have something constitutionally wrong with him. The critic whose pleasure lies in a single form of theatrical exhibition is one who may be listened to with interest and with profit once in a while, but surely not regularly. "The Mikado" is a work of art no less than "Romeo and Juliet." "Shuffle Along" has its place in the theatre, and in criticism perhaps no less, equally with "Connais-toi" and "Heartbreak House."

### § 26

There is a type of critic who is always greatly surprised when a good-looking actress gives a performance as competent as a homely one.

## § 27

In the bulk of American dramatic criticism, the faculty of observation would seem to consist merely in the knack for hitting off the more obvious and superficial traits of a character. Thus, any old woman who keeps on mouthing such familiar sayings as "What a small world it is, after all!" or "My rheumatics is troubling me agin; it's a-goin' to rain," is uniformly greeted as a well-rounded character made sharply photographic by the playwright's considerable powers of perception.

## § 28

The praise of inferior men is insulting. The condemnation of inferior men is comic.

## § 29

The bluer the nose, the greener the mind, the grayer the sense of beauty, the yellower the honor, the redder the indignation, and the more lavender the sex.

## § 30

There has been, on the part of certain commentators whose linguistic gifts are confined to the

English language, and who are proud of it, a disposition to wax ironical at such persons as have professed to comprehend, at least in a measure, and to be moved by, the performances in alien tongues of Duse, Tilla Durieux, Maurice de Féraudy, the Moscow Art Theatre company and, on a lower level, the Grand Guignol troupe and certain other dramatic immigrants. While, true enough, these commentators are not far wrong in their detection of a great deal of hypocrisy in the situation, it seems to me that they are less correct in their assumption that because they happen to know no language other than their own, therefore no one else does, and even less correct in their second assumption that thorough familiarity with an alien tongue is essential to an understanding of, and to a sympathetic response to, an acting performance in that tongue. Aside from the obvious fact that there is ample time for a critic to read in the English text the play in the alien tongue that he is about to see, and thus acquaint himself with it; aside from the even more obvious fact that if he is a professional critic he should already be thoroughly familiar with most of the standard works that these foreigners have presented and are presenting—surely, the critic who doesn't know “Ghosts,” “The Lady from the Sea,” “An Enemy of the People,” “Night Refuge,” the plays of Tche-

koff, and the like, well enough by this time is pretty poorly equipped for his job—aside from these very obvious facts, a thorough knowledge of an alien tongue seems to me to be no more vitally essential to the grasping of an alien actor's performance than a knowledge of the deaf and dumb signal language is essential to a comprehension of pantomime. Let us imagine that Charlie Chaplin were a Greek and that his moving picture, "The Kid," were to be transferred from the screen to the stage and played in Greek. Would it be any the less intelligible and any the less moving?

If drama consisted chiefly in words, if its effect were ever mainly conveyed through the spoken word, it might be otherwise; but drama is something different. The greatest moments of any drama are those moments that constitute the spaces of silence between the speaking of one character and the speaking of another. These silences between speech are the juices of drama. It is then that we get the effects for which the dramatist has paved the way with words. Every great play is a pantomime at bottom. Drama is pantomime adorned and embellished with literary graces. The dramatist, when first he imagines his play, imagines it not in terms of speech, but in terms of situation. He sees his theme, in his mind's eye, as a blue-print. The great drama of the world

is not spoken by the characters so much as it is looked and, above all, felt by them. The play of the features and the joy and ache of the heart are as Esperanto: a universal language. One does not have to know Italian to understand a woman's tears, or Russian to comprehend a man's laughter. Drama is emotion. If we feel what a character, through its actor, feels, it is not entirely important that we should know what he thinks. All this, of course, would not hold water were these alien troupes to go in for the so-called intellectual drama—the most paradoxical and idiotic phrase in the English language—such plays, shall we say, as "Back to Methuselah" or one of the Granville Barker lectures. But their plays are far different, in the main the pure stuff of the emotions—save in the minds of such commentators as look on Ibsen as a great thinker first and a great dramatist second. Their plays are, with, so far as I can remember, the single possible exception of Tchekoff, emotional fabrics. The person who cannot grasp a play by D'Annunzio, and more particularly Duse's performance of the central rôle in such a play, without being an Italian scholar would be unable to grasp Chopin's Funeral March because he was not a corpse. He is the sort of dumb-bell who would call one a posturer for pretending to enjoy and be moved by "Der Rosenkavalier"

when one was not a professor of German, or for admiring Bach's "Bauern Cantate" when one was not a peasant. Show me the professional critic who says that he is not fit to criticize the Moscow Art Theatre company's performance of, say, Goldoni's "The Mistress of the Inn," because he is not thoroughly up on Russian, and I'll show you a critic who is not fit to criticize Zuloaga because he does not happen to be a Spaniard. . . . There are, let us incidentally not forget, fifty English-speaking people who understand the plays of Shakespeare for every English-speaking person who understands his language.

### § 31

Nothing surprises one more than the periodic sudden and inexplicable shifts in one's tastes and likes. A man is at such times practically a stranger to himself. He is at a loss to comprehend himself. The phenomenon has happened at one time or another to all of us.

### § 32

For some reason that I am not able to decipher, the average dramatic critic of forty years or so is ashamed to confess that he was ever a boy with

a boy's careless and happy theatrical tastes and pleasures. It is his wish, assiduously cultivated, to impress his customers that wisdom began with him simultaneously with diapers. Intelligence was his wet-nurse, and a thorough understanding of the dramatic unities his even before he began to use his big toe in lieu of a peppermint lozenge. In the case of such a fellow, one often finds that he is telling the truth in at least one respect, to wit, that at the age of fifteen he knew quite as much as he knows today.

### § 33

The enthusiasms of the young critic for new gods are ever found to be actually less for the new gods than for the young critic himself. The critics among the Younger Generation of the present or any other period appreciate with proper sagacity that they cannot attract any attention by going over the already soundly covered field of the old gods of art, letters and drama, and that if they are to gain any notice at all that notice must be achieved by novel and startling means. No easier way lies open than the creation of a new god and the loud beating of a dishpan before his altar. The very noise, however essentially meaningless and idiotic, is bound to make passersby

turn their heads and perhaps stop a moment to listen. Thus, we get a succession of Gertrude Steins, Tagores, Guillaume Apollinaires, Erik Saties, Ronald Firbanks, Arthur Machens and the like who, once they have done duty in giving the young critics their little day in court, pass from the scene and are heard of never again.

### § 34

Very young men and very old men alone are cocksure. The soundest of critics is thus in all likelihood the man of middle years. He has temporarily outgrown the cocksureness of youth and he is still this side of the cocksureness of age. He is temporarily free from empty prejudice, free from youth's revolt and from age's revolt against revolt, and beset by a healthy skepticism and doubt. He is of open mind; he is without indignation; he doesn't give a damn.



## ART AND ARTIST



## § 1

Too much emphasis, it seems to me, is laid by the critics upon form. Perfection of form is hardly the *sine qua non* of fine art. The old dime novel had almost perfect form; Joseph Conrad has none, or at best very little, in the currently accepted sense. Great art is often as formless as inferior art is sleek in form.

## § 2

The value of a detached point of view in artistic creation seems to me to be absurdly overestimated. Truly great art is the product of passionate interest and hot enthusiasm. That interest and enthusiasm may affect a cool and self-condescending smile, and that smile may in turn be interpreted as the smile of detachment, but it is never—save in the instance of the second-grade artist—anything of the kind. A tonic detached philosophy is not necessarily the fruit of a detached point of view. It is more often the fruit of a positive point of view which, to its own pleas-

urable inexpectation and disconcertment, has found itself cut into, half frustrated and divided into two by the sudden incursion of a point of view that appears to be equally positive in its approach to the truth.

### § 3

The complex fashioned by genius is ever simple. There is in it the innocence of the fairy tale, and the understanding of the philosopher. There is the sentiment that is eternally implicit in gentle faith, and the sternness that one finds always in the heart of beauty.

### § 4

There never lived a great artist who was not a profound hedonist.

### § 5

To be convincing, emotion may go so far and no farther. Emotion become never so slightly too intense skirts perilously the abyss of burlesque. It is thus that the writing of tragedy calls for a more highly developed precision of genius than any other form of literary or dramatic composition.

## § 6

Of all the arts, sculpture leaves me the coldest. I can admire a fine piece of sculpture, but my admiration and my enthusiasm, such as they are, are of but a few moments' duration. "Superb!" I say, and then, my duty by myself done, I move away. There is nothing to haul me back; there is nothing to prolong my gratified æsthetic sense and mood. Of all the arts, sculpture seems to me to be the one designed primarily for the gratification of the specific artists themselves. Music, literature, painting and the other arts are for all peoples. Sculpture is an art for sculptors.

## § 7

Although I know that it is not commonly so regarded, it has always seemed to me that biography is one of the very highest forms of creative art. Carlyle's "Frederick" is to my mind fully as important an achievement in artistic creation as any one of the Beethoven symphonies, or any half dozen celebrated autobiographical novels that one chooses to name. As a genuine work of art, it is unquestionably superior to half the novels written in Spain in the last fifty years and to all the music written in France in the last hundred.

A great biography has always in it an undertone of autobiography: it is the man in terms of his master. It is the autobiography of an artist's taste, tact, culture and skill in terms of a greater man's taste, tact, culture and skill, or, it may be, in terms of their absence. Strachey's "Queen Victoria," though of the second level, is yet a vastly finer relative example of creative art, I feel, than all of Sir Edward Hughes' or Thomas Lawrence's biographies of royalty composed in oils.

The extreme difficulty of the task that confronts the biographer is made evident by the very few first-rate biographies, as opposed to the hundreds upon hundreds of fifth-rate ones, that line the shelves of the world's library. The average biography is a mere cuckooing of the average biography that has preceded it, as the latter in turn is a mere cuckooing of the biography that has preceded *it*. It is made up, (1)—as Shaw once pointed out—of "at least two anecdotes, one to illustrate the miraculous powers of the hero's brain, and another to exhibit his courage and dexterity in personal combat"; (2) of a lengthy and very touching description of the profound influence on the hero's life and career that was exercised by his beloved mother; (3) of an account of his early poverty and of the indomitable will and strength of purpose that these early hardships

could not break; (4) of the celebrated persons with whom the hero came into contact and of his witty rebuke of one of these who was disposed to be somewhat snobbish; (5) of the news that, though he seemed to be a heavy smoker, he never smoked more than one-half of a cigar; throwing the remaining half away; (6) of an account of the hero's affairs of the heart, save the really pungent ones; (7) of a story relating how he on a cold winter night took off his overcoat and gave it to a shivering beggar; (8) of an account of his great grief when his wife died; (9) of a description of his keen sense of humor, his placidity under the most trying conditions, his essentially spiritual nature, and of the fact that even in his last years he belied his age and was as light on his feet as a kitten; (10) of a testimonial to his infallible memory, embellished with an anecdote relating how as a little boy he went into a small candy store in Bangor, Maine, with only a couple of pennies in his pocket and, desiring a stick of candy, was trusted by the old negro woman for the other penny and how, somewhat cryptically—in view of the ponderable difference in their ages—he encountered the old woman in Bad Nauheim sixty-one years later, recognized her, went up to her, recalled himself to her and gave her the penny plus a five-dollar bill; and (11) and finally, of a num-

ber of such observations as "The forces which entered into his life were as the kings and queens and pawns of chess; full of confidence, he played the game," but above all and *imprimis*, "A successful life always means a strong man behind it. Behind every great achievement is a man greater than the achievement. Such a man was Elmer P. Reifenschneider!"

Such bushwah is, of course, biography in the sense and in the degree that the inscribed gold watch which employés give to their employer at Christmas-time is a token of their affection, admiration and good will. It is a biography not of a certain man's faults and virtues but an autobiography of a certain other man's weaknesses and boot-lickings. It presents us with the spectacle of a writer following his subject as a small boy follows the glittering lady bareback rider in a circus parade. The true biography is no such thing. It is the re-creation of one man by another. It is a portrait in articulate oils. It is the tale of a vivid figure, vividly told by a vivid artist. It is, in short, a novel that is a masterpiece of that greatest of all fancy, the fancy of truth and of romantic realism.

### § 8

There are men who do not like talk of sex and

writings on sex. There are men who have dyspepsia and cannot eat.

### § 9

The beautiful day, the day of blue and gold and sunshine, is God's gift to the plain people; the bad day, the day of gloom and gray and rain, He has reserved for the exclusive pleasure of the aristocracy. The artist, the connoisseur of emotions, the philosopher—these have no use for the fair day: it distracts them, summons them from their introspection and solitude, calls them into the open. On such a day, work and those pleasures dear to men with a taste for the sequestered are impossible: the outside beckons too persuasively and too disconcertingly. But when the world is full of wet and fog and the monotony of rain, then the artist, the connoisseur of quiet, the philosopher and all their brothers are happy. For it is on such days, while the yokelry is melancholy because it cannot be eating dill pickles and cheese sandwiches on the roadsides, or riding in Fords through the Jersey swamps, or chasing little white gutta-percha balls across the grass with a repertoire of clubs, that men of soul and sadness revel in the happiness that only God's elect can comprehend.

## § 10

It is the mark of the first-rate playwright that his attitude toward his dramatic themes is, for all his affection and sympathy, platonic. Unlike the second-rate playwright who is ever passionately enamored of and mentally seduced by his themes, this other remains superior to those themes that he concerns himself with and, while they move ahead in their dramatic courses, stands aside and lets them pass by him in review to the accompaniment of his sympathetic yet critical snickers. The second-rate playwright cries out in his recognizably typical enthusiasm, "I've got a great idea for a play!" The first-rate playwright scratches his nose and says, "I've got a great idea for a play—if it be properly disparaged."

This is, of course, not necessarily to say that the first-rate playwright is insincere, or a mocker, or a wearer of the cap and bells. What he is is one in whom the creative and critical impulses run as twin streams, one gifted with the sophistication to doubt the verity of the strongest of his own passions and prejudices, and with the wisdom to appreciate that this very doubt will the better persuade his auditors of the approach to verity of these same passions and prejudices. He dramatizes exactly neither his passions and prejudices

nor his skepticism of these passions and prejudices but rather the strip of philosophical no man's land that lies between. He does not precisely disparage his thematic idea; he permits his idea rather to disparage him, at least to a degree. For, being a first-rate man, he has a first-rate man's distrust of himself and of even the best of his ideas and philosophies. That distrust Shakespeare had, and Molière had, and Ibsen had, and Porto-Riche and Shaw have now. The plays of these men are in considerable part full of that distrust, and it is this distrust that has given birth to a drama which is full, round and complete as opposed to the profile drama of their lesser contemporaries.

One can add nothing to the great dramatists of self-distrust, for they dramatize not only themselves and their own ideas but, ever skeptical, they dramatize simultaneously and coincidentally us and our opposing ideas. These they fuse with their own, or, if they do not exactly fuse, at least permit intermittently to invade. The great drama is not a one-man drama but a two-man drama: a dramatization of me in terms of you. Or, perhaps more accurately, a dramatization by one man of another man in terms of a third man in whom are combined the skepticism of the first man and the faith of the second. This, of course, sounds

like a mere tricky way of presenting the ancient platitude that a great play is simply a play that sees all around a character and a theme, that exhibits all the phases and all the sides. But there may be a trifle more to it. For if it were merely a case of presenting all the sides of a theme, Galsworthy would be a greater dramatist than—to stick to contemporary dramatists—either Porto-Riche or Shaw, which I privilege myself violently to doubt. There is something still more to the notion. Galsworthy, for all his ability to see two sides of a theme, cannot, like Porto-Riche and Shaw, see two sides of *himself*. There lies the difference. He writes plays the way a very competent lawyer might write them. Porto-Riche and Shaw, on the other hand, write plays the way each would write them were each an entirely different man somehow possessed of his own peculiar genius. These dramatists, like fine dramatists ever, are each of them Siamese twins of philosophy and philosophical doubt bound together by the tissue of sardonic humor. Great drama is the reflection of a great doubt in the heart and mind of a great, sad, gay man. The drama of such a writer as Galsworthy is only the reflection of a great faith in the heart and mind of a skeptic. The gulf is a wide one.

## § 11

Surely not the least of the numerous metropolitan drolleries is the spectacle frequently provided by the vainglory of those Wall Street bankers who take it upon themselves to invade gatherings of artists and speak their little pieces for the latters' delectation. There is hardly a public meeting, exhibition or banquet of artists that does not vouchsafe the juicy tableau of one banker or another making an address on a subject he understands nothing about to men of a species apart from himself about whom he similarly understands nothing. Artists are artists and bankers are bankers and never the twain shall meet. Yet these bankers not a little impertinently seek to push into a class to which they do not belong and cannot by virtue of lack of æsthetic sensitiveness and perception ever belong. Invite a banker to speak to an assemblage of artists and he will jump to accept before the envelope is half open. Invite an artist to speak before an assemblage of bankers and he would let out a horse-laugh that could be heard ten miles away.

## § 12

Of the many English writers who have come over here to lecture or merely to visit, but one, Joseph

Conrad, has been looked on and estimated by the American public purely as a man of letters. The American public has viewed the rest not as artists in varying degree, but as so many social figures, also in varying degree. Thus, one never hears a word in appraisal of Hugh Walpole the novelist, but only of Hugh Walpole the good dresser who has such a charming way with the ladies. (The one regret seems to be that Walpole can't dance.) There is no talk of Frank Swinnerton the artist, but a vast clatter over Frank Swinnerton the genial dinner guest, the witty conversationalist, the delightful good mixer. Zangwill is not mentioned as a writer; he is talked of simply as an ill-mannered, ill-natured, loud-mouthed boor, which personally, true enough, he is. H. G. Wells' talents are never discussed. All one hears of is the peculiar cockney manner of his speech and his funny looking clothes. Chesterton's embarrassing habit of fingering a certain unmentionable portion of his habiliments while being interviewed is gabbled about from one end of the country to the other, but hardly a soul has anything to say of him as an essayist. And so with the others. They order these things very much better in England. When an American writer visits or lectures in England, the English public never mentions him at all.

## § 13

Unless one be possessed of a very great poetic or ironic fancy, philosophical explorations into the character of the Hereafter may best be abandoned, especially in the theatre. When they are not abandoned, we are very likely to get such things as the Macphersons' "Happy Ending," which pictures heaven as a Pittsburgh millionaire's garden party, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which pictures it as a German Christmas card, and Vane's "Outward Bound," which reveals it to be something very much like a William Hodge play.

## § 14

There is no such thing as an absolutely truthful autobiography. Every such work, though it may truthfully set down the discreditable facts, concerns itself ultimately with converting such discreditable facts into a compositely creditable picture of its author. There was never a writer of an autobiography who did not see to it that he emerged from that autobiography a picturesque and, for all his deficiencies, an appealing fellow.

## § 15

The usual formula of the W. J. Locke school of

novelists is to take a conventional novel of the early '90's and palm it off as something wistfully new by making the hero a Breton trapeze performer with a penchant for Swinburne and the heroine a thirty-five year old Roumanian stenographer with a wen on her nose but possessed of a tender heart withal, and by transferring the scene from the manor house in Chelmsford, Essex, to an apiary in the south of Albania. There is always a considerable portion of the public that is vastly impressed by the retailing of a Bertha M. Clay plot through the mouths of Bertha M. Clay characters deceptively masked in the falsefaces of a Drury Lane Christmas extravaganza, and it is to this public that the Locke school successfully addresses itself. By taking over the theme of such a yellow-back as, say, Mrs. Georgie Sheldon's "Grazia's Mistake" or Charles Garvice's "'Twas Love's Fault," dressing up the leading characters either after designs by a Chauve Souris artist or in the style of the McAlpin Hotel grill-room and making them talk in a cross between J. M. Barrie and Calvin Coolidge, these novelists adroitly contrive to pass themselves off for quaintly original literary geniuses and persuade their readers that what they are reading is very piquant and richly fanciful stuff.

## § 16

The actor, by the very nature of his craft, must be popular or perish. Hence the actor, save on rare occasions, is not logically an artist and cannot conduct himself as one.

## § 17

Poetry is uncouth, unshaven, boisterous prose afflicted with a crying drunk. Through its empty prose head there suddenly course unsteady visions of its boyhood home, the little red schoolhouse, its first sweetheart, and the first kiss in the field of daisies back of the old circus lot, and, passing its hand over its prosy, stubby face, it has a moment of alcoholic self-disesteem and of melancholy repentance for what it thinks it might have been and might have had—had things been other than they are—of an almost unreal happiness. It idiotically and boozily wants something it cannot have, something that, once gone, it can never recapture, and in this mood it sings its futile, foolish, groggy and sometimes very beautiful song.

## § 18

I am the only man writing about the theatre and

drama in America who has not at one time or another composed an essay proving that Charlie Chaplin is a great artist. Chaplin is such an immensely amusing fellow that it has never occurred to me to stop and ponder the question whether he was a great artist or not a great artist, or even an artist at all. He has kept me laughing so much that I haven't had time. I doubt that Chaplin can possibly be an artist. There are so many admitted, unquestionable artists of comedy who have tried to make me laugh and haven't succeeded that I have misgivings so far as this Charlie is concerned. He is too funny to be like these other artists. Either he isn't an artist or I am impervious to art.

Every time that some person like Chaplin comes along and does his job, whatever it is, supremely well, a lot of æsthetic Columbuses excitedly tumble down off the bleachers and frantically begin sticking up posters on the fences proclaiming him a great artist, "richly gifted with the vital commingling of humor and pathos," who would make a wonderful Hamlet. While these Columbuses of artistic genius hotly debate with one another the problem whether Cézanne, Remy de Gourmont, Dvôrák, James Joyce and ten or twenty others deserve to be rated as artists or merely clever tricksters—and fail to come to a conclusion—they

never for a moment hesitate when it comes to someone like Charlie. And doubtless quite as much to the estimable Charlie's amusement as to the amusement of the rest of us who remain quietly and comfortably seated in the bleachers and who are content to be hugely entertained by a hugely entertaining fellow without feeling the necessity of sticking a label on him.

The word artist is the most loosely handled word in our language. In the old days, an artist was someone like Michelangelo or Shakespeare or Beethoven. Today, an artist is someone like D. W. Griffith, Johnny Weaver or Fannie Brice. There is some doubt about Richard Strauss, it would seem, but none at all about Joe Cook. So far as I can make out, the only person writing, painting, singing, composing, dancing, modeling, acting or juggling billiard balls in America in this day and hour who isn't unanimously conceded to be an artist by the jury of Columbuses is Theodore Dreiser. I have before me the latest copy of a well-known American periodical. Among the seventy-three persons who are hailed in its pages as distinguished artists I note the following: John Murray Anderson, Jess Sweetser, Queenie Smith, Penrhyn Stanlaws, Rollo Peters, Lucile the dressmaker, Vincent Lopez, Irene Castle, Walter Lippmann, the originator of the "Krazy Kat" car-

toons, Gallagher and Shean, Robert W. Chambers, Wetzel the tailor, Babe Ruth, the designer of the Chalmers Six, Sidney Howard the author of "Swords," Yvonne George, Jackie Coogan, Samuel Rzeschewski the infant chess player, the Rath Brothers, and H. C. Witwer. Poor Chaplin, clown extraordinary, a movie comedian of the first rank, and a soul of brilliantly amusing antic, now becomes a mere great artist like these others. Such is the penalty of superb proficiency in a land of doodles.

### § 19

The notion, held by certain artists, that an artist can most convincingly record emotion when he himself is from one romantic cause or another afire with emotion is directly kin to the notion that a drunken man makes the best bartender.

### § 20

It is significant that no New Englander has ever been able to write a beautiful love story.

### § 21

It is the common notion of the novelist turned dramatist that, inasmuch as a play may run only

two hours or so, everything that makes a character recognizable and convincing in a novel, all the little details and differences, all the little peculiarities and ramifications, must be packed tightly into one small bundle plainly marked on the outside with the character's one outstanding identifying trait, and the *reductio* offered to an audience, by way of getting the effect quickly and saving time, as the complete character. This procedure produces not a character so much as a characteristic: a single idiosyncrasy in trousers.

### § 22

The drama of George Bernard Shaw is criticized as being merely a drama of adroit paradoxes. What else, pray, is much of the drama of Shakespeare, Molière and Ibsen?

### § 23

The English artist is much more sensitive to criticism than the American. With negligible exception, the Englishman is extremely touchy when criticism steps upon his toes. Equally with negligible exception, the American gives the impression of not caring a whoop.

## § 24

If the combined aim and object of art lies in the stirring of the emotions, and is praiseworthy, why should the similar aim and object of the vices be regarded as meretricious? If the Madonnas of Raphael, Holbein, Murillo and Da Vinci are commendable in that they stir the imagination to the contentments of faith, why are not the whiskeys of Dewar, Macdonald, Haig and Macdougal commendable for the same reason? If a Bach fugue is praised for stimulating the mind, why not a Corona Corona? If the senses are commendably excited by Balzac and Zola, why shouldn't they be excited, and equally commendably, by means that may be described as being somewhat less literary?

## § 25

Someone has said that there can be nothing between those who are artists and those who are not artists. In other words, that close friendship and social intercourse between an artist and a business man, say, are impossible. They may like each other and have certain things in common, but soon or late the artist will be unable to abide the other's conversation, point of view and general philosophy and will be compelled to desert him.

That there is a deal of truth in this, I do not presume to deny. But it also seems to me that if ever there were men who had little in common between them, artists practising entirely different arts are such men. There is infinitely less between a writer and a sculptor, for instance, less that draws them together and interests them and makes them companionable one to the other, than there is between a composer and a physician, say, or between a painter and a lawyer, or between a novelist and a wholesale butcher or movie director. The artist is interesting and close to the artist, as a general thing, only when both practise the same form of art. Thus writers are interesting to writers and painters are interesting to painters, but the average writer would as lief spend two weeks with a painter, however great an artist the latter, as he would with a chiropractor or a barber.

### § 26

Toe dancing, however proficient, regularly fails to impress me. I have never been able to discern anything graceful or beautiful in it. There is to it a sense of hard preparation and strain that spoils it for me. Dancing should not give one such an impression. To be attractive, it should be wild and careless, with an unmistakable carnival qual-

ity. Toe dancing is to dancing what Walter Camp's Daily Dozen is to a zestful walk through the springtime woods.

### § 27

“It has taken me three years and it has cost \$1,500,000, but I have at last succeeded in screening the masterpiece of my life!” triumphantly exclaimed the great moving picture director.

“It has taken me three years and it has cost me my eyesight, but I have at last succeeded in engraving the entire Lord’s Prayer on the head of a pin!” triumphantly exclaimed the hermit of the Pyrenees.

### § 28

I wonder why it is that male authors who are excessively homely almost invariably excel in descriptions of beautiful women?

### § 29

The Comstocks are at least justified in their contention that the sincerity of an author means noth-

ing if his book is, in their eyes, actionable. Morals aside, the much talked of sincerity of the artist is, as they rightly hold, very largely bosh. The most sincere American author of the last three years against whom the Comstocks proceeded produced a piece of work which, disregarding its morals, was distinctly third-rate. The least sincere American author of the last three years against whom they proceeded produced a piece of work which, again disregarding its morals, was absolutely first-rate. It is further worthy of note that an all-righteous and accurately critical God let the Comstocks get the better of the sincere third-rater and let the insincere first-rater get the better of the Comstocks.

### § 30

The new so-called art photography loses itself in a great deal of evasive and nonsensical hocus-pocus. The purpose and object of a photograph are, very simply, to make the sitter appear to his or her best advantage and look as handsome as possible. The new art photography, with its paraphernalia of shadows, lights, Chinese backgrounds and Greek urns with papier-mâché geraniums stuck into them, most often contrives to make the subject look like a cross between him or herself

and a three-days-old corpse. The resulting photograph is neither a photograph of the subject nor an art study. It is a hybrid that is half bad photography and half worse photography of bad painting.

### § 31

Every time science and invention make another step forward it is at the expense of art. Thus the moving picture takes its pound of flesh from drama, the phonograph its pound of flesh from music, and the radio its pound of flesh from the reading lamp and literature.

## CERTAIN DRAMATISTS



## § 1

*Strindberg*.—Genius, in the case of Strindberg, is the capacity for dramatizing infinite pains. There is no major ache, whether of psyche or toe, that does not claim its moment of his enthusiasm. Life, to him, is the panorama of a great and encompassing colic. His tragedy does not so much purge the emotions and leave in its wake the beauty that is ever the residuum of profound sorrow as constipate hope, and resolution, and human faith. Where Ibsen is the mocking dramatist of tragedy, Strindberg is the tragedian of mocking drama. He looks on the world as a child looks at the skeleton of some prehistoric monster, simultaneously beset by awe and disbelief and seeking relief from its bewilderment in a nervous and unconvincing laughter. Like Ibsen, a rebel against the established dramatic technic of his time, the liberator of that technic from its retarding ball and chain, and a pioneer whose brilliant path-clearing made free the way for the many who have followed in his steps, he is unlike Ibsen in that his technic is ever the slave-driver of his themes, beat-

ing down and weakening them with its tyrannical lash. The technic of Ibsen, to the contrary, is ever the offspring of his themes, rising naturally and inevitably out of those themes as the only medium for their capture and expression. Strindberg, with few exceptions, superimposes his technic arbitrarily upon his themes, where Ibsen permits his themes each to make up its own technic, so to speak, as it goes along. The close technical resemblances in various Ibsen plays are often merely superficial. But, almost without exception, the fundamental technical idiosyncrasies of Strindberg are visible in every one of his plays, sometimes to the complete confounding of the clarity of those plays.

Strindberg, on such occasions as his mind was still blessed with reason, wrote excellent drama, some of it of enduring life. On other occasions, after insanity had laid its grip upon him, he wrote what must frankly be set down as utter nonsense, the babbling of an imbecile in whom one glimpsed pathetically but the distant rumors of a quondam genius. There are certain affable critics who cannot persuade themselves that it is possible for a man once possessed of a sharp and luminous intelligence ever to go completely mad, ever to lose all of his antecedent rationality, and it is they, as sympathetic artistically as they are misinformed

pathologically, who are in their charity responsible for much of the amiable rubigo that clings to the critical appraisal of Strindberg and his drama. To answer this, as answer has been made, by saying that a mad and inscrutable world is best to be dramatized thus madly and inscrutably, is to say that only the idiot is capable of realizing and transmuting the poetry that lies in the tale of an idiot dancing down the wind. The heart and soul of genius may be mad, but the mind of true genius is ever as clear as the heavens seen through pine trees. Strindberg is occasionally a genius. But Strindberg is also occasionally an absurdly unconscious quack.

## § 2

*Pinero.*—That an idea is not available dramatically until it has become a platitude is itself one of the most platitudinous of dramatic platitudes. But there is a considerable difference in the mere dramatic availability of a platitude and the conversion of the platitude into lively and engaging drama. Good drama, in point of fact, consists in so veiling a basic platitude with the vari-colored gauzes of imaginative beauty that it shall be but vaguely perceptible to those who give it eye and ear. The greater the dramatist, the more suc-

cessful he is in deceiving his audiences as to the existence in his work of the platitude. He is, in a way of speaking, a prestidigitator of platitudes: one whose infinite legerdemain of metaphor, fancy, wit and surface originality is successful constantly in making the ever-present platitude seem to disappear. Pinero's latest play, "The Enchanted Cottage," is grounded upon the platitude that love makes the parties to it oblivious to each other's faults and defects. But instead of triumphing over this platitude, the platitude triumphs over its dramatist. And the result is a play that, for all its occasional moments of beauty, marks still another step in the rapid disintegration of a dramatist who, overestimated as he ever has been by such critics as are given to a greater admiration for blue-print dramaturgy than for the purple-print of a salient imagination, was yet a shrewd craftsman, a graceful penman and a considerable influence in the theatre of the years that marked the other side of the frontier of the present century.

This disintegration is a peculiarly interesting thing: peculiarly interesting because it betrays how little, after all, mere great technical dexterity matters where the ever-changing years and times have brought with them no bounty of matured invention and fresh inspiration and marching novelty of thought. We thus see Pinero successively serving

as the most devastatingly accurate critic of Pinero who ever put pen to paper. We thus see, in each of his successive later plays, Pinero reducing himself to the bare bones of his talent, a talent that was once hailed as genius. That uncommonly fine technic is still there, a skeleton in the closet now grinning pitifully and not a little desolately at all those who once mistook it for a vital philosophical study of the anatomy of love and marriage, of divorce and romance, and of profound human reflexes and impulses. It breaks through the negligible tissue-paper hoop of content, does this technical dexterity, and now at length faces the audience for just what it is: technical dexterity in strip tights—nothing more. Behind it, there is nothing—save the ribbons of pretty pink tissue-paper, and the hole.

“The Enchanted Cottage” serves as a comprehensive autobiography of Pinero’s virtues and shortcomings. It is manipulated with all the old, familiar deftness; it is couched in words that are often polite and pleasing; it reveals in a scene or two that feeling for graceful understanding and pity which has intermittently distinguished the man. But, with these, it is stark in its disclosure of the bound-in imagination, the thumb-worn processes of thought, the obedience to popular prejudice and the surrender to commonplace dramatic

antic that have similarly and not less intermittently distinguished the same playwright. Save in his farces, two of them as good as anything the English-speaking stage has offered, Pinero has presented himself dramatically from the beginning to the now of his career largely as an imaginative rubber-stamp glowing with an architectural passion. He has sought to build strong and beautiful castles upon the quicksands of a talent rent by an excessive sentimentality cloaked in a species of mid-Victorian revolt. He has achieved the walls of these castles, but not the interiors. They have been beautiful and imposing in the degree that the moving picture sets of castles, composed entirely of fronts and with nothing behind them, are beautiful and imposing. A walk around them, and they are mere artful scaffoldings. Thus in this "*Enchanted Cottage*" we have facing us only the charming façade of a play. Back of that façade, hardly deceptive enough to fool even the most susceptible, are nothing but literal and obvious props, straining to hold it up.

The rapidly fading resources of Pinero are borne heavily in on the spectator as the play plods along on its heavy course. By way of comedy, the playwright relies upon the antiquated device of causing one character throughout the action to ad-

dress another by different names. By way of sentiment, he brings on a dream child at the finish to cuddle in a sleeping woman's arms. By way of intensifying the dramatic atmosphere, he lugs in the reliable old thunderstorm. By way of a substitute for vernal fancy, he reverts to the time-honored dream device, negotiated with a "Greenwich Village Follies" literalness, wherein various figures out of the past appear to the strains of soft, off-stage music. He builds up laughs in the most conventional manner, as in the instance of having the Smallwoods relate the objects they have successively run over with their motor-car. He seeks to bag an easy sympathy by making his two leading male characters victims of the War for Humanity. His conception of fairy-like atmosphere is to have a dozen or more little blue electric lights flicker fitfully from different parts of the stage. . . .

I once gained a reputation for ill-mannered criticism by defining a measure of Barrie's work as sugar out-maneuvering diabetes. Were I presently not a critic of extremely urbane manners, I should define this work of Pinero's as the attempted out-maneuvering of Barrie by a diabetic Eleanor H. Porter. It is sugar confounding sugar. It is the play of an old man trying vainly, if at

times charmingly, to be young. It has its moments, but they are swallowed up in its hours.

### § 3

*Jones*.—The kind of line and dialogue with which Bertha M. Clay and Laura Jean Libbey used to inflame the sensibilities of servant girls and with which, some years later, Henry Arthur Jones was due to impress even more profoundly the dramatic critics of his day, are very much of a piece. The gulf between such a yellow-back, say, as Bertha M. Clay's "Redeemed by Love, or Love Works Wonders," published in the late '90's, and such a play as Jones' "Mrs. Dane's Defense," produced in the early 1900's, for instance, is not nearly so wide as certain persons seem to imagine. For every such Clay gem as "I could almost fancy that I had lived before, and had known you in another life" (p. 138), there is a Jones sister brilliant such as "I was a child in knowledge; I knew nothing of life, nothing of the world" (p. 99). And for every Clay fritter like "If anything can redeem her, it will be love" (*same page*), there is ready at hand a Jones nonesuch to the effect that "She was an angel—she took me into her home and gave out that I was a widow. . . . My child was born there" (*same page*).

## § 4

*Shaw.*—It is the ingratitude of criticism that it can never forgive established genius for being anything less than complete genius. Like a sharp-shooter, it hides behind a rock on the upward trail waiting, and not without an occasional smirk, for genius to slip on a stray pebble and descend never so slightly from the heights. Genius is the one thing in the world that can never afford to be even itself; it must ever progressively be more than itself. The artist who has painted a great picture or chiseled out a great statue or composed a great symphony or written a great play must next paint a greater picture or chisel out a greater statue or compose a greater symphony or write a greater play. If he does not, criticism will wag its head in doubt, and speculate on its earlier high estimate of him, and even now and again—base ingrate!—laugh derisively. This modicum of derisive laughter is now heard once more in certain quarters in the instance of George Bernard Shaw and his latest work, “Saint Joan,” and in these certain quarters and among these deplorable and ignominious scoffers I regret to report that I find myself. For though the genius who has given us the greatest modern English

ironic historical drama and one of the greatest of modern English comedies and the best of all modern English satirical farces and the most intelligent of modern English dialectic fantasies has been gradually slipping down, down the golden trail in the last decade and with his comparatively feeble one act plays like "The Inca of Perusalem" and ten act plays like "Heartbreak House" and two hundred and seventy-five act plays like "Back to Methusaleh" has gathered behind the mountainside rock an increasing number of sceptical *francs-tireurs*, there have been, and are still, those of us who look to him stubbornly and steadfastly to duplicate and even augment the dramatic gifts that these years ago were so dazzlingly his. But each new year with its new manuscript brings a new disappointment, and the treasures that the man of genius has given us in the past are with an ignoble thanklessness forgotten in the light of his more recent failures. I say failures, although of course such a man never fails as meaner men fail. There are streaks of diamond dust in even his shoddy. Yet one expects—has the right of expectation that the man himself has given us—that these streaks shall be not mere streaks. The cobra eyes of criticism ever fasten their deadly glare upon the artist who has already realized himself.

Thus, Shaw's "Saint Joan," though it is a work far above the general, fails to satisfy us. From a lesser genius, it might pass muster—at least to a degree. From the hand of Shaw, it comes as an *affaire flambée*. We have had the Drinkwater chronicle play, and now we have a Vegetarian one. It is relatively undernourished; it cries for Old Tawny and red meat. It is as literal as the inscription on an envelope; the incidents of history with which it concerns itself are sieved through an indubitable imagination whose holes in this instance are so large that the incidents remain much as they were before. One looks for brilliant illumination and one finds but pretty, unsatisfying candle light.

This "Saint Joan" seems to me to be for the major portion an affectation on Shaw's part to prove late in his career to a doubting world that he has, after all, a heart. Why Shaw should want to convince the world that he has a sympathetic heart baffles me quite as much as if Darwin or Huxley or Einstein had wished or would wish similarly to convince the world of the fact in his own case. But age ever grows sentimental, and Shaw, whose genius lay in tonic cynicism and disillusion, has grown comfortably sweet. Relatively so, true enough, but the genius of incredulity and dissent cannot compromise with the angels and survive.

Yet one cannot convince one's self that this late compromise on Shaw's part is not very largely another instance of his sagacious showmanship, or in other words, conscious hokum. Shaw is undoubtedly just selling his soulfulness to the box-office devil. The sentiment of his rare Cleopatra was wise, and not without its leaven of irony, and very truly beautiful. The sentiment of his Joan of Arc is the bald sentiment of a war-time soapbox plea for money to buy milk for French babies. It is effective in an open and shut way, but its artistic integrity is suspect. Now and again in the course of his play, Shaw, with the ghost of the Shaw of fifteen years ago mocking him, becomes for a moment himself again, and we get a flash of the old-time quick mind playing its smiling skepticism in counterpoint to the Rubinstein "Melody in F" dramatic motif. But splendid though these isolated moments are—the speeches of the Archbishop of Rheims in the second episode and of the bench of the Inquisition in the episode before the last are Shaw at his best—they yet paradoxically, because of the confusion of the sentimental and rational keys, weaken considerably the texture of the drama as a whole. The greatest love scene in all the drama of all the world, a scene of tenderness and passion and glory all compact, would fall promptly to pieces were the heroine to

hiccup or the hero, embarrassingly finding an alien particle in his mouth, to spit. Shaw's hiccuping is amusing and his expectorations are corrective and prophylactic, but they do not jibe with the story of Joan as he has set out to tell it and as actually he has told it. The story of Joan is perhaps not a story for the theatre of Shaw, after all. It is a fairy tale pure and simple, or it is nothing—an inspiring and lovely fairy tale for the drunken old philosophers who are the children of the world. It vanishes before the clear and searching light of the mind as a fairy vanishes before the clear and searching light of dawn and day. It is a tale for the night of the imagination, and such a tale is not for the pen of a Shaw. It is a tale for a Rostand, or a Barrie at his best, or maybe for some Molnar. If irony creeps into it, that irony should be an irony that springs not from the mind but from the heart.

Speaking of Shaw's "Joan" from the purely theatrical rather than from the library point of view, I cannot persuade myself that such an essentially inferior—very, very inferior—play as Moreau's on the same subject does not constitute a much more persuasive and convincing spectacle. It takes all for granted, and it accordingly sweeps the necessary theatrical emotions up into its arms. It may be a very poor play, but it never falters in

its grim, artistically pitiable, passion. Shaw, to the contrary, has sung his dramatic "Marseillaise" with a trace of British accent. The melody is there, still vibrant and still thrilling, but with too many disturbing suggestions of Piccadilly. *It* moves, yet *we* do not move. It thinks when we would feel; it is literal when we would soar into the clouds of fancy; it is humorous, with a Kraus-meyer's Alley species of humor—as in the handling of the episode of the eggs in the first act—when we do not wish to be humorous. The old Shaw jokes on the dunderheadedness and insularity of the English somehow do not seem to belong here; the George V. Hobart dream allegory of the epilogue is the old derisory Shaw making an obviously desperate last jump for the step of the rearmost car as the train is quickly pulling out and away from him; the episode of Joan kneeling, sword aloft, head bathed by the spotlight man, before proceeding on her way to lift the siege of Orléans is the stained-glass stuff of the old Stair and Havlin circuit. When Shaw is literal, his literality lacks vital simplicity; when he is fanciful, as in the epilogue, his fancy is more literal still.

### § 5

*Wilde*.—Oscar Wilde is condemned by a cer-

tain school of critics as having been merely very clever. Could criticism reach sillier heights? To be merely very clever was precisely what Wilde strove for and precisely what he successfully achieved. He had no other intent, no other aim. To criticize Wilde for not being a profound philosopher but for being merely very clever is to criticize Kant for not being very clever but merely a profound philosopher.

### § 6

*Lenormand*.—The Theatre Guild is an organization not the least of whose virtues is a successful and praiseworthy cunning. This cunning is on view whenever the Guild produces a play by some new foreign dramatist about whom the critical element in its public is in the dark. On such occasions the Guild's artifice is displayed to the full. This artifice, embodied in its publicity matter and program notes, is usually very happy in accomplishing its end, as I have noted. Of it, we engage a typical instance in the case of the French playwright, H. R. Lenormand, and his drama, "Les Ratés," translated as "The Failures." In its preliminary press-agency of the play and in its program notes, the Guild exercised the shrewdest care that Lenormand should be presented to his

American audiences and critics as distinctly an art-theatre playwright, the leader of the Parisian group "dramatically in tune with psychology and science," and the author only of such dramatic work as goes in for *succès d'estime*—"which," to quote the program, "opened for him the doors of the art theatre and inevitably closed those of the commercial playhouses." There was, further, elaborate mention of Gémier's production of his "Poussière," of Pitoeff's productions of his "Le Temps est un Songe" and "Les Ratés," of his "La Dent Rouge" at the Odéon,—of impressive names on end by way of what our friends the spiritualists call establishing the proper mood. That the Guild succeeded admirably in establishing this mood so far as the American critics were concerned, and that through the establishment of this mood the latter were subtly thrown off the track of a cool and sound appraisal of the Lenormand drama which the Guild presented and were blinded by the excellent hocus-pocus to certain otherwise obvious and not altogether auspicious secrets of its genesis must be clearly apparent to anyone who, without program notes, has followed the career of Lenormand in France.

"The Failures" is a drama whose considerable poignancy and considerable theatrical effectiveness are due infinitely less to its author's being

“in tune with the modern thought of today in psychology and science” than to its author’s long antecedent practical acquaintance with terse and effective commercial theatrical writing gained from his association with Max Maurey’s *Grand Guignol*. “The Failures” is in essence a series of typical *Grand Guignol* one-actors. No less than eight of its fourteen episodes are completely in the *Guignol* key and manner. Echoes of such of Lenormand’s *Guignol* pieces as, for example, “*La Folie Blanche*,” “*Vers la Lumière*,” “*L’Esprit Souterrain*” and “*Terres Chaudes*”—all carefully omitted by the Guild in its publicity matter—are clearly heard in scene after scene. The *Guignol* method is there, and unmistakably. The thrills and drama and comedy and technic are vastly less the thrills and drama and comedy and technic of the *Théâtre des Arts* than of the little box-office playhouse in the Rue Chaptal. “The Failures” is a thoroughly interesting drama of dissolution, decay and death not because Lenormand is the daring experimentalist, the revolutionary psychoanalyst and the *succès d'estime* fanatic of the Guild’s program notes, but because he is a hard, old-fashioned practical playwright schooled not in art theatres but in purely commercial theatres and because his psychological explorations into character are very careful to be theatrically emotional instead of

untheatrically cerebral. His "The Failures" is, first and foremost, a good show. If it does not make money, well then, neither does such a bad show as "Across the Street." There is too much talk about art in the theatre.

### § 7

*Barrie*.—Barrie cannot be achieved by the mere process of writing an ordinary comedy and interrupting it along toward ten o'clock with a gulpy dream scene, which apparently is what a certain type of present-day playwright believes. The secret of Barrie is to set forth the heavily sentimental in terms of the mildly cynical—a good trick that he negotiates with uncommon skill; the achievement of the playwright who tries his hand at the same trick is the mildly cynical in terms of the heavily sentimental. He gets his apparatus of dramatic legerdemain mixed up and the result is that the heavily sentimental fails to vanish behind the mildly cynical black velvet as Barrie deftly contrives to make it vanish. It remains disconcertingly in full view of the audience with its legs crossed and confounds not only the playwright's intention but the audience's imposed-upon emotional keyboard.

## § 8

*Maeterlinck*.—The genius of Maurice Maeterlinck is in considerable degree a product of the talented imagination of second-rate critics. In all the civilized countries of the world there has been but one critic of the first rank who has succumbed to the Belgian Rabindranath Tagore, and James Huneker, for all his other high analytical gifts, was admittedly a poor critic of the theatre and drama. At that, I single out the late Lord Jim somewhat unfairly, for, though he wrote of Maeterlinck in terms sweet and ecstatic, he was given—when his right foot rested upon a brass rail and his mind took on that rare noonday clarity of his—to a skeptical snickering at his own judgment. Those persons who have seen in Maeterlinck an artist of pure facet have been betrayed into that estimate by his posturing of genius rather than by any actual genius. An extraordinarily shrewd showman with a fine feeling for the poetry that lies ever at the breast of beauty but with a relatively small aptitude for imprisoning that feeling in words, he has succeeded—in the past, if not in more recent years—in persuading the susceptibles that the task he set himself was a task accomplished. Yet though his field was strewn with

flowers and though his aim was at the heart of beauty, his arrow almost uniformly found its home in the rear of an earthly cow. And the reason therefor is at hand. The man himself is essentially less the spiritual artist that he would have us believe than a materialist in a Belasco get-up, with the two qualities constantly warring with each other and with the latter, by virtue of its greater bulk, ever the confounding vanquisher of the former. Maeterlinck is like nothing so much as the nun in Reinhardt's production of "The Miracle": the performer of a pious rôle who, in order properly to impress the paying public, keeps to himself in his hotel room and permits himself seldom to be seen off the stage, and then only with eyes cast down and face made ascetic with a liberal smear of holy talcum powder. As his particular hotel room, Maeterlinck has affected a remote ruined castle, but for the rest he has conducted himself more or less faithfully after the instructions of whoever it is who would be Mr. Morris Gest's press-agent if Gest lived and operated in Belgium. But the job of living up to his self-made legend was a difficult one, and thus it came about presently that the good Maeterlinck's foot slipped, as Halvard Solness' foot slipped before him, and that the good Maeterlinck found his circus pretensions crushed in the quarry whereinto he fell. He could, poor fellow,

keep up the bluff no longer. Twenty years is a long time. There is a Boulevard des Italiens as well as a path of brambles and thorns that winds behind a Belgian retreat. There are rich movie lots in Hollywood as well as virgin meadows in Herenthals. There are Hilda Wangels in the world as well as bees. "And who are you?" (*He pulls off his whiskers.*) "I am Hawkshaw, the detective!"

Thus did the Belgian Shakespeare (how they now must laugh who invented the phrase!), mayhap not wholly consciously, remove his spiritual plumage and reveal to his astonished eulogists the charlatan underneath. This charlatan, this pretender, has ever been there behind the venerable mystic whiskers, for as a man doeth so is he in his heart, and it has been this spirit of charlatanism and pretense in Maeterlinck that has conveyed itself to almost everything that he has written. For one touch of uncorrupted beauty, there have been a dozen touches of affectation and sham: like W. C. Fields' fly-paper, they have stuck irremovably to Maeterlinck's fingers for all his efforts to shake them off. For one honest flight of free imagination, there have been two dozen flights of mincing self-consciousness. The horses that the Stratford Shakespeare held in check outside the Globe Theatre turned into Pegasus; the Pegasus that

the Belgian Shakespeare tried to hold in check for Tintagiles, Aglavaine, Sélysette, Joyzelle, Péllèas, Mélisande and many such another promptly and disconcertingly turned back into so many everyday nags. Genius dramatizes itself. All that Maeterlinck has dramatized is the vague symbol of genius.

Although, true enough, "Péllèas and Mélisande" came into being early in his career, it may be taken as a typical example of his generally defective artistry. While the play has some of the inevitable appeal that inheres in any story of romantic love, whether that story be told by the Shakespeare of "Romeo and Juliet" or the Richard Harding Davis of "Soldiers of Fortune," it otherwise misses in every detail the heightened appeal that comes from an imaginative orchestration of such a story's emotions and from a felicitous verbal embroidery of such a story's little fancies. Striving for the simplicity that the play must have or in the not having perish, Maeterlinck succeeds only in achieving the kind of simplicity that is achieved by a rich dowager dressed up as a country maid at a fancy dress ball. Striving again for drama at the play's numerous curtain falls, he contrives only such banalities as long, tense, silent gazes, bald announcements of peril imminently to descend, sudden streams of radiance from bunchlights turned

on in the wings, and—if not quite all of the international hokum trinity: Mother, the Baby and the Flag—at least Mother and the Baby. His verse or poetic prose has an occasional starlit glimmer—I say occasional very generously, as I can recall only two such instances in the entire play, and they are minor ones—but in the mass it is the stuff of an imagination chained to a linotype machine. It is uninspired; it is pompous, peacocky, snobbishly simple—royal raiment worn for rags' sake.

### § 9

*Milne, Lonsdale and Maugham.*—While Mr. A. A. Milne is spending one-third of his time writing weakly humorous dialogue and the remaining two-thirds composing feuilletons indignantly denouncing nine-tenths of the British and American dramatic critics for not laughing themselves to death over it, one of his young English colleagues is concerning himself solely, and perhaps a trifle more relevantly, with fashioning as witty dialogue as the Anglo-American theatre has heard in the round of several seasons. If this second young Englishman were as apt in his fabrication of plays as he is in the manufacture of droll colloquy, one would be disposed to view him as a likely saviour of that

London stage from which the spirit of finished light comedy seems lately to have evaporated. But the plays of Frederick Lonsdale show so much less invention and imagination than his verbal ornamentation of those plays that one remembers them as one ever remembers a pleasant dinner party, recalling only the amiable conversation and not exactly remembering whether one had anything to eat or not. This, doubtless, is not at all bad: it may be Lonsdale's deliberate dodge agreeably to talk one out of thinking of his plays. It may be his stratagem to take a time-worn theme and by handling it with a circumspect obviousness throw his dialogue, through sheer contrast, into doubly high relief. (I surely need not name a certain great dramatic genius who indulged in the same practice.) But whether it is or is not his stratagem, Lonsdale's dialogic talent remains unmistakable. It is sophisticated without sophistication's usual brashness; it is polished without the air of that type of polish which suggests only the painted canvas drawing-room of the London actor-manager stage; it is at times as witty as Wilde and as acutely observant in a plain, everyday way as our own Kin Hubbard. At times. At other times—of such we have a sample in "*Spring Cleaning*" when the woman of the streets prattles wistfully of babies—he descends to the lowest depths of yokelism. To

these depths, Lonsdale's more experienced and somewhat older compatriot and fellow wit, Maugham, never descends. The latter, further, is a more skilful playwright than the former. Yet, peculiarly enough, he is a playwright who has never quite realized himself. He has all the qualities that should make him the first polite comedy writer of the present-day English theatre; he has salt and erudition, taste and dexterity, invention and viewpoint; yet an apparently inborn British conventionality contrives too often to reduce his high talents to the level of that conventionality. His themes are now and again brave, as in the instance of "Our Betters"; the writer himself is brave; but the British conventionality is there at bottom all the same despite the deceptive frosting of swagger and impudence. Maugham is as cosmopolitan a writer as England knows today, yet his cosmopolitanism ever flies the Union Jack at its masthead.

### § 10

*Molnar*.—The popular conception of Ferencz Molnar in this country is of a persistently sardonic, and even iconoclastic, fellow who views the world mainly with a dubious half-closed left eye and who, for all his periods of warm sympathy and

gracious concern, is yet at bottom at once a skeptic and a cynic. The true Molnar is nothing of the sort. He is, in simple, a sentimentalist who shrewdly masks his sentimentality—a sentimentality almost of a piece with that, say, of a J. Hartley Manners—with a but half-believed in, yet extremely dexterous and most persuasive, derisory humor. It is Molnar's inherent and incorruptible literary-dramatic talent, automatically working its will upon him whether he wishes it or not, that conceals the personal and psychic peculiarities of the man himself.

This, as I put it on paper, sounds somewhat absurd, but a study of Molnar's work and a knowledge of the man lead me to believe that it isn't very far from the truth. Of all the plays he has ever written, but two—one a long one and the other a negligible one-acter—are not intrinsically as sweetly sentimental as any "Peg o' My Heart" or "Daddy Longlegs." (I omit such a play as "Der Herr Verteidiger" which is plainly just a try for box-office money with thief and detective whangdoodle.) Aside from "The Devil" and the one-acter alluded to—"The Actress" is its title, unless memory betrays me—the bulk of the gifted Hungarian's writing for the theatre is, upon plumbing, found to be evening music sung in broad daylight: a serenade at high noon. Consider, for all the

illusory counterpoint of cynicism, such of his leading plays as "Liliom," "The Fable of the Wolf" (locally known as "The Phantom Rival"), "The Swan," "The Guardsman" and "Heavenly and Earthly Love." The impulse in each case (less, perhaps, in "The Guardsman" than in the instance of the others) is a frank and unabashed sentiment that hovers very closely about the borderland of sentimentality. "Liliom," generally looked on as being inspired by a greater skepticism and irony than any of the other plays cited, was actually inspired by remorse for those qualities. It is, in a word, its author's apologia for a directly antecedent cynicism, as he himself has freely and with intimate detail confessed to his friends. "What is the theme of 'Liliom' as you see it?" they asked of him one day not long ago. And before he replied they gave vent to their own views of the theme: its fantastic quasi-Nietzschean doctrine, its hint at irreligion, its incredulity before the common concept of life, its dissent, its demur and its mockery. "You found all these in my play?" put in Molnar. "Excellent! They are admirable dramatic qualities; 'Liliom,' with them, is not a bad idea at all. I am glad that you found them in it. Only I did not put them in!" "Then what is the idea that you did put in?" they wanted to know. "The idea of 'Liliom,' as I wrote it, is simply this,"

he answered. "If a man is loved by a woman, and has a baby by her, his life may be said to be complete. That is all there is to it."

This preamble is only by way of speculating upon the surprise of the American critics when, encountering a play like Molnar's "Fashions for Men," they find themselves confounded by its to them unwontedly sentimental nature. This, they say, is a Molnar they have never known and have not anticipated. Yet such a play is obviously Molnar through and through—the real and the typical Molnar. It is, true enough, more transparently sentimental than some of his other plays, but the formula is in the main that which bears the Molnar trademark and should be immediately recognizable. Where "Liliom" deals with the doctrine of resistance, "Fashions for Men" deals with the doctrine of non-resistance; but the point of view that Molnar brings to bear upon both is at bottom and in the end much the same. In both, sentiment triumphs over a realistic philosophy. In both, the tear of Molnar mingles with the smile of the world. "Liliom" is a sentimental defense of and apology for hardness; "Fashions for Men" a hard defense of and apology for sentiment. The drama of Molnar, in a word, is the drama of spiritual osteopathy.

## § 11

*Bataille et Cie.*—It is not, as is so often argued, the theme of such a typical French play as, say, Bataille's "La Tendresse" that is psychically and emotionally alien to the American; it is, rather, the characters. This is not the contradiction in terms that superficially it seems to be. Any American can comprehend, and very clearly, a theme such as this wherein an old man, betrayed by his young mistress, finds in her sympathy and tenderness toward him a soothing and permanent warrant for forgiveness; but what the American, by virtue of his very soul, cannot comprehend is the manner in which and the processes by which such an old man, as a Frenchman sees and appraises him, conducts himself in the working out of the theme and, more important still, thinks his way to its conclusion.

Were an American dramatist to take exactly the same theme that Bataille has taken and were he to work it out in exactly the same way, his central character would yet be very much different from the French dramatist's. Though the theme would remain the same at bottom, the ratiocinations and conduct of the hero would—chiefly in externals but to no small degree in internals as well—differ radically from the French hero's. Place, in real

life, a Frenchman and an American in precisely the same situation, and each—though he may eventually bring up at the same point—will act and think out his way to that point wholly unlike the other. It is the same, plainly enough, with the Frenchman and American when they are set into drama. There are, for example, hundreds of American men who have experienced in real life such a situation as comprises a French drama like—shall we say?—“Amoureuse,” just as there are hundreds of Frenchmen who have experienced it. But it is extremely doubtful that a single one of them has thought it out and brought it to its conclusion as the hero Etienne, reflecting the hundreds of Frenchmen, has. And this, for all the fact that the conclusion has been, in the cases of both these Americans and Frenchmen, in actual life exactly the same. Thus, while the American theatre audience finds the average French dramatic theme perfectly intelligible, the same audience finds the personages who manipulate the theme completely unfamiliar and almost grotesquely strange. This is the case, as I have noted, with such a representative French play as the Bataille work. The theme is universal, but the characters are as isolatedly French as Reutlinger’s photographs, Regine Flory’s lingerie and the advertisements in a boulevard *cabinet d’aisance*.

## § 12

*Galsworthy*.—It is the purpose and technic of Galsworthy to intellectualize the Pinero drama. The result, though not always entirely successful—since the intellectualization too often gets in the way of the drama—is at least entertaining. For even on such occasions as one does not admire a Galsworthy play and is aggrieved by the author's habit of placing his most serious personal convictions in the mouth of a comic character, thus making his audiences believe that he does not consider them to be as important and weighty as actually he does consider them, one has always a comfortable feeling of welcome relief that what one is seeing and what one is listening to is the product of culture, experience and a practised taste. In addition, though Galsworthy sometimes makes a considerable ado over subjects that everyone else has already long before agreed upon, it is always more pleasant to listen to an intelligent man saying nothing than to an unintelligent one trying to say something. Galsworthy frequently says nothing, but he generally says it persuasively, charmingly, inoffensively, and very agreeably. In such a play as "Windows," for example, he preaches the doctrine of *laissez faire* without a single new

observation or a single novel turn of viewpoint--his approach to the subject is over a road worn down by countless travelers before him--yet the composition in the main is made congenial by the simple force of his skill as a writer and of his own amiable manners. The play, which is padded unconscionably, lies in the revolutionary twin philosophies that a person's character is as unchangeable as the color of his eyes and that danger comes from pitching one's ideals too high. As Galsworthy, since the war broke out, has had a passion for allegory, I should not be surprised to learn from him that this play of his, like "The Skin Game" and "Loyalties," is supposed to have its analogy in the post-war European situation, but what I get out of it is chiefly a mild Pinero play with the maid serving dialectics instead of tea and with the other characters discussing action instead of acting.

### § 13

*Pirandello.*—In the prevailing wild hat-tossing over the genius of the Italian Pirandello I find myself, for all my prolonged efforts at self-hypnosis, unable to participate. That he is the innovator and highly original talent that his advocates make

out, I presume to doubt: I have pointed out in an earlier volume what seems to me to be the genealogy of his technic. That technic is, for the most part, the dramatization not of a literal theme, but of the aura of that literal theme; not a dramatization of direct character, but of the psychological ectoplasm of direct character. In simpler words, he is the dramatist of a theme's ghost, that emanation from a theme which is but vaguely a part of its corporeal self, which is—paradoxically, yet I believe accurately, speaking—a contradiction of what would, in the instance of another dramatist's creation, naturally go on in the central character's mind. Pirandello builds up his central character, or mouthpiece, with all the conventionality of a Henry Arthur Jones, places him on an imaginary stage, and then enters into a debate with him, taking the negative side. He then dramatizes the central character as two central characters in the body of a single actor, the one conventional Jones character playing synchronously in counterpoint to the Pirandello debating character. This character duet is then placed on the actual stage and set into a framework composed of the overtones of a conventional Victorian play. The result is often a bit confusing. His intention is clearer than his accomplishment. He seems ever in the position of

a writer who has an excellent idea but who, for all his clear grasp of the idea, is unable to imprison it vividly and exactly in the written word.

Successfully to dramatize vagueness—which is Pirandello's aim—one must be doubly lucid. Successfully to dramatize unintelligibility, one must be distinctly intelligible. And Pirandello is no Ibsen. He is, or rather he impresses me as, an eager and enthusiastic Impressionist from whose palette all save bright red and bright blue paint is missing, and who bravely seeks to make up the shortage of exact shades and colors by reducing the bright red and bright blue with hard Croton water to eight or ten different degrees of spurious pastel. His dramatic red and blue are thus convincing enough, but the rest of his shades are suspect. His characters and his theme get under weigh in a forthright and plausible manner, but before long their hard breathing begins to obscure their words and logic. Pirandello is always puffing hard to keep up with his theme. That theme, whatever it may be, is pretty certain to be found tantalizingly showing him its coat-tails. Pirandello is essentially, it seems to me, a moderately proficient trick playwright who happens to be an educated man whose education stands disconcertingly in the way of his being completely effective in the practical theatre. His psychological philoso-

phy is unquestionably well-grounded and sound, but it steps continually on the toes of his measure of dramatic talent. And the impression that one consequently gets from his plays is of an able psychological novelist carrying on a rather difficult and baffled conversation with a Broadway theatrical manager.

Pirandello's dramatic themes are thus ever more interesting than his thematic dramas. Possessed of a much more fertile and analytical mind than any other South European writing at the present time for the theatre, he finds himself in the embarrassing predicament of evolving themes that either escape the dramatic form completely or, perhaps more exactly, the particular dramatic form that thus far has flutteringly eluded his ingenious but defective butterfly net. While it may be utterly ridiculous to say that a man may be too intelligent to write good theatre plays, it may not be too ridiculous to say that Pirandello's especial kind of intelligence prevents him from achieving good theatre plays. The ideas which his intelligence gives birth to are often above the homely plane of drama. They are at times no more suited to the dramatic form than would be the ideas implicit in Kant's "Foundation of the Metaphysics of Ethics," Goethe's "Introduction to the *Propylæa*," or a treatise on the *Bibos frontalis*. A sound dramatic

idea must be generically transitive; it must move, so to speak, even before the dramatist touches it. The dramatic ideas of Pirandello are essentially static. To make them seem to move at all, and in their moving produce a semblance of drama, it is necessary for him to have recourse to the propulsive agency of alien dramatic factors which in the very act of bequeathing a bit of slow motion to his undramatic ideas rob those ideas of much of their original power of static conviction. The effect is akin to making a moving picture out of Rembrandt's "Lesson in Anatomy." What remains is not composition, but de-composition. A Pirandello play is less a play than a compromise with a play. It presents the picture of a group of actors in grease-paint hanging around a dissecting room. Actors give one the impression of being slightly out of place in the Pirandello drama. And not only out of place, but—sometimes—absurd. Pirandello thinks dramatically, it is clear, not in terms of a stage and footlights and performers, but in terms of an anomalous institution that is part clinic and part sideshow. The result, as I have said, is interesting, but chiefly if one closes one's eyes, listens attentively, and screws one's mind up the while to imagine that one is not in a theatre. His "Henry IV," for a single example, with its theme of a man who in dementia believes

himself to be head of the Holy Roman Empire and who, when once again after twenty years he regains his sanity, prefers to keep up the show of insanity as a refuge from the world that has grown harsh and ugly around him, is in this way infinitely more satisfactory to the ear than to the eye. The ear catches a neat-handed story of metaphysics and psychology; the eye sees only the mind of Pirandello trying grotesquely to hide itself in the body of a ranting and gesticulating actor. It is all very well to argue that the Italian is trying to fashion a new type of drama—actually, he is doing nothing of the kind—but before one sets out to fashion a new type of drama one must have known and forgotten the old.

#### § 14

*Cuitry*.—Sacha Guitry is able to sketch character with lightning swiftness—a word is sometimes sufficient. He can hit off a bit of light philosophy with a pucker of the lips, a whistle, or a turn of the thumb. He writes in terms of a camera shutter—in a series of clicks. He is the genius of the dramatic snapshot. His is the most exceptional minor talent in the theatre of today. His one great fault lies in the constant repetition of himself. In “*Nono*,” his first play, written

some twenty years ago, one encounters many of the tricks and devices, verbal and otherwise, that one still encounters in his plays of 1923 and 1924. Yet he accomplishes wonders by applying simple observation to the tip of his pen. By writing—and reading—the single word *l'addition* in three different pitches at the conclusion of the restaurant scene in one of his plays, for example, he achieves crescendo comedy that many of his contemporaries succeed in achieving only with a dozen or more typed pages.

### § 15

*Drinkwater.*—It is John Drinkwater's handicap as a dramatist that the actor in him is ever vanquishing the author, with the result that, save in a few instances, the central figures in his chronicles such as "Lincoln," "Cromwell" and "Lee" are considerably less Lincoln, Cromwell and Lee than, respectively, Drinkwater in a loose black Prince Albert, a frowsy top hat and whiskers, in the uniform of the commander of the Parliamentary army, and in the gray regimentals of the American southern States. Drinkwater's Lee, especially, is three parts Drinkwater, the actor, to one part Drinkwater, the dramatist; of the true Lee there is, save in isolated moments, but an imperceptible

trace. The Lee of the play is not the Lee of fact and history so much as the Lee of the sentimental schoolgirl imagination as it existed south of the Mason-Dixon line in the days of '61. It is this fancy that Drinkwater has actually dramatized. What we get is not the Lee who lived, but Lee as he might have been imagined to be by his loving old negro mammy. The Drinkwater Lee, as one may perceive from the following excerpt from the play—one of many like it—is less the calm, dignified commander of the Confederate army than an actor in a Bronson Howard melodrama attitudinizing in a pretty uniform and speaking with an unremitting consciousness of the footlights in front of him:

Penner: Oh, we're just going. Good-night, Colonel Lee.

Lee (*at the veranda door*): Good-night, Duff. But its not Colonel Lee any longer.

Penner: Not Colonel—(*He stands for a moment, then turns back to the dance-room excitedly, and begins to speak to the people beyond.*) I say—(*He checks himself. Then after a moment he goes up to Lee and holds out his hand.*) Will you let me, sir? (*As Lee takes his hand.*) Lee of Virginia! (*He turns hurriedly and goes.*)

Lee (*after a pause, not moving*): Virginia!

CURTAIN

These historical characters of the Drinkwater drama are directly out of Madame Tussaud's. They simply serve as mouthpieces for a highly

self-conscious poet with a nice gift for ventriloquism.

### § 16

*Clemence Dane.*—The tragedy of talent is that it essays to be genius. Clemence Dane is a case in point. A talented writer, she sets herself tasks reserved for genius and so ends up less practically talented than were tact and modesty more severely to guide her pretty but unimportant competences. Her “Will Shakespeare” in the hands of some such person as the Shaw who wrote “Caesar and Cleopatra” would undoubtedly have possessed all the virtues that in her own hands have become faults. So strainful is her approach to the subject and so self-conscious is she of the difficulty of the task she has posed against herself that her manuscript is continually opening its mouth to promise something that it itself knows it cannot fulfill. It thus reminds one not infrequently of Binns and Binns’ elaborate preparation for a difficult acrobatic balancing act which, after an endless amount of handkerchief tossing, rubbing of feet on resin, bowing to the audience, and hoarse Italian injunctions, never comes off. The play impresses one, in short, as a good play that remains to be written. Miss Dane calls her work “an invention.” This

she has a perfect right to call it, provided that her notion of an invention is to dehumanize illustrious personages of history and place them into a dehistoricized version of history. I see no great objection to any competent dramatist's taking certain liberties with history, but I can see no justification for taking liberties with the personages who have made that history. If I were a playwright bent upon making an interesting play out of the subject of the Punic Wars, say, I shouldn't hesitate a moment to telescope the naval battles of Mylæ and Ecnomus with the conquest of Syracuse and the invasion of Italy—or, if I had had enough drinks, for all it matters with the Battle of Lookout Mountain—but I should surely entertain certain qualms about making Hannibal a Roman soldier in love with Madame du Barry and Scipio Africanus a German dialect comedian killed in the last act by General Cornwallis. It strikes me that Miss Dane has done very much this kind of thing. That she sticks to historical facts approximately as closely as did the late Creel Press Bureau does not bother me one way or the other, but when she gives us a William Shakespeare who conducts himself like a mush-headed college boy hanging around the "Follies" stage-door and who has no more humor than Charles Rann Kennedy, a Henslowe who talks like Professor George Pierce Baker, a Mary Fitton with

all the wild passion of an osteopath, and a Queen Elizabeth who acts and talks like George M. Cohan in a red wig and hoopskirt—when she does this, I must confess to a desire to deliver myself of a polite but none the less audible sniffle.

Thus, never having shared the tumultuous enthusiasm of certain critics for the stunning genius of Miss Dane, I am unable to share their tumultuous surprise over the stunning mediocrity of her most recent play, "The Way Things Happen." This essential mediocrity, for all its occasional concealment in a deftly turned line or phrase, has been clearly discernible in her work from the first. As between "A Bill of Divorcement" and "The Way Things Happen," there is little to choose. Both are third-rate, the former but slightly less so than the latter. And her "Will Shakespeare," already referred to, is at best a good attempt at what is in general a comparatively poor accomplishment. It is not difficult to penetrate the reasons for the critical approval of the last-named play, since there is a school of criticism that is ever hornswoggled by a play, however faulty, which treats of historical personages. All that one has to do to stir this school to high commendation is to take over some such old opera as "Mignon," cut out the music, rename Wilhelm Meister François Villon and the actress Filina Catherine de Vaus-

selles, convert the gypsy chief Giarno into the priest Sermaise, make Mignon the daughter of the Duc Charles d'Orléans, have Mr. Deems Taylor compose a drinking song for the tavern scene, raise the height of the ceilings ten feet to give the necessary spacious air to the production, drop the curtain thirteen or fourteen times during the course of the evening (since a biographical play in the conventional number of acts would arouse the critics' suspicions), and craftily preface the whole business by sending to the critics, a week in advance of the opening and in plain envelopes, marked copies of the ecstatic notices from the London papers. It is true that there are several passages of excellent writing in Miss Dane's Shakespeare play. It is also true that there are several passages of excellent writing in the worst play of Percy MacKaye.

Clemence Dane, to repeat, is a mild talent that postures a golden inspiration. Hers is the kind of playwriting that impresses one as being conscious and ever mindful of its own importance. "A Bill of Divorcement" is nothing more than an ordinary play of commerce, of a somewhat remote vintage, given a contemporaneous feel by hitching it to a modern turn in divorce jurisprudence. "The Way Things Happen" is a mixture of Sardou and Henry Arthur Jones simi-

larly given a contemporaneous feel by phrasing the passages concerning adultery with calm directness instead of in the old-time, roundabout, flossy manner and by causing the concupiscent villain to tell the heroine promptly and exactly what he is driving at instead of making him elaborately pave the way by having Meadows serve a pâté and a magnum of Cordon Rouge and then chasing the poor girl around the table. Yet Miss Dane, for all the intrinsic banality of her materials, proceeds about her business with quite the same straight face and scholarly wrinkles as were affected by her fellow English genius of a decade and a half ago, the late Stanley Houghton. She appears to be as deeply impressed by her work as some of the rest of us are not. She is as intense as July heat, and frequently as enervating.

“The Way Things Happen,” which is a fair example of the Dane craft, contains instances of adroit dramatic writing as do her other plays. But it is generally, so far as its dramatic materials and flavors go, a London Cohan Review of 1895. She trots out all the favorite playwrights and dramatic stencils of the days when Shaw reigned and stormed in the pages of the *Saturday Review* and gravely—without the flicker of a Cohan smile—puts them once again through their paces. One by one they enter, under aliases that deceive no

one, and go through their venerable parlor, drawing-room and bachelor-chambers tricks. Miss Henry Arthur Jones goes at midnight to the rooms of the wicked Sir Arthur Wing Pinero to get from him the papers that would incriminate the heroic young Sydney Grundy. She leaves behind her, in place of Oscar Wilde's pair of long white gloves, R. C. Carton's shawl, which is found by her jealous rival, the haughty Miss H. V. Esmond. Before, during and subsequent to this, the young juvenile in the blue serge jacket and white flannels, Hubert Henry Davies, bounces jovially in and out of the proceedings; the sweet, gray-haired Mrs. Augustin Daly, dear, kindly old soul, falls back in her chair and breathes her last even as she is smiling her happiness over the letter announcing that her son, absent these many years, is to return on the morrow; and the faithful old servant, Alfred Sutro (in this instance a maid), offers with touchingly loyal lachrymation to stay on at her post for all the family's financial reverses. Nothing is missing.

### § 17

*Cohan.*—George M. Cohan's revisions of those plays which he buys for production are as popularly successful as they are by this time com-

pletely familiar. They take the form of prefixing to each of the author's original speeches such phrases as "By gosh," "Gee whiz," "I say, kid," "Oh baby," "I'll tell the world," and "You said a mouthful," of adding a wealth of back-slapping and thigh-slapping to the stage business, of writing in at least one mention of a million dollars and one cheer for the United States, and of deleting twenty or thirty sides of dialogue and substituting pantomime.

### § 18

*Owen Davis.*—Such is the nature of American criticism that had the Pulitzer Prize play called "Ice Bound" been written by a recognized first-rate dramatist it would have been dubbed a clearly deficient piece of work where, written by Owen Davis, it was hailed instead as a notable achievement. This critical charity that so generously bestows its alms of praise upon worthy intent rather than upon actual accomplishment, where the intent is that of some hitherto purely commercial and tawdry craftsman, strikes off what is perhaps the most common failing of criticism as it is promiscuously practised in the Republic. Believing, correctly enough, that the duty of criticism is to encourage fine purpose and honest endeavor, it puts

the cart before the horse by confusing such purpose and endeavor on the part of one artistically sensitive enough to execute them—at least to a degree—with the same purpose and endeavor on the part of one who, for all his praiseworthy aspiration, is condemned by a stark and ineradicable artistic inadequacy to an unrealizable dream. It is this critical charity that, while essentially destructive, yet passes current for constructive criticism.

In the case of Mr. Davis, the thing has gone to absurd lengths. Simply because this playwright has devoted the years of his life to cheap Fourteenth Street melodrama and Broadway piffle-puffs and then, honestly ashamed of himself in his late fifties, has essayed overnight to be a Eugene O'Neill—a metamorphosis as easy of negotiation as a Sing Sing prisoner's effort to escape by pretending that he is a zebra—because of this grotesque, if commendatory, essay, our critics have thrown their hats into the air for all the world as if the business of soundly appreciative criticism were less with grandeur than with delusions of grandeur. And thus it came about that the play which Mr. Davis calls "Ice Bound" was greeted with encomiums ranging all the way from the customary daily newspaper pyrotechnics to this magnificently overwhelming set-piece in the the-

atrical weekly *Variety*: " 'Ice Bound' is as good as most of Ibsen's plays and better than any of Hauptmann's—it is minus the fad for the foreign that invests these transplanted documents with an artificial, specious and frequently fallacious importance. That Owen Davis is a serious thinker, a student of the best in drama and a laureate of moods and conditions of his time, cannot be denied."

It is true enough that "Ice Bound" is the best play that the author of "Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl," "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model," "Sinners," "Forever After," "Dreams for Sale" and "The Detour" has written, but in the same aesthetic way and in the same comparative critical sense is a certain book (whatever its title may be) doubtless the best that Robert W. Chambers, author of "The Common Law," "Police!!!" "The Restless Sex," "In Secret," "The Crimson Tide," etc., has written. Yet sound quality is quite another matter; it has nothing whatsoever to do with comparative worth. In Davis' case, what happened in the matter of "The Detour" has happened again in the instance of "Ice Bound." Because these two plays are not deliberately cheap, as the other of Davis' plays have been, the avoidance of cheapness has been confounded with the presence of merit. That merit, alas, is not there. We have

an heroic striving for integrity; we have a pains-taking sweat for quality; but the ghosts of compromise and of equivoque and of hokum that in the life have walked the earth with Mr. Davis these thirty years and more are ever at his elbow with their thumbs posed vexatiously at the tips of their noses. Such is the penalty of the Malvolio who would a Hamlet be; such the tragedy of a writer who, perhaps originally not without potential talent, has walked the streets of dramatic letters for so long that, when he would reform, finds that he has nothing left to reform with. "Ice Bound" aims at the stars, and breaks a clay pipe. The reward is the five-cent cigar of journalistic eulogy.

### § 19

*Hoffe*.—The critical wonderment over the at times curious unevenness of Monckton Hoffe's dramatic writing, over the startlingly good suddenly crossed with the flabbergastingly bad, and vice versa—leading to various suspicions and conjectures not entirely complimentary to the author in question—is quickly to be dissipated if the wonderers in point will be less full of wonder and more full of criticism.

It remains alone for the work of genius and mediocrity to be consistent and even in quality.

The work of the genius and the work of the hack have that much in common. One is consistently fine, the other consistently bad. One has no disturbing trace of cheapness, the other no confounding trace of goodness. But in the great middle-ground of diverse talents that is bounded to the north by genius and to the south by incompetence, unevenness, quite naturally, shoots its arrows hither and thither. For mere talent is often a self-baffling and thin-skinned thing. It is subject to all sorts of self-doubt and self-criticism, to all sorts of shifting winds and turns of faith and ideas that seem radiant one moment and gray the next, to all sorts of bitter self-realization of one's ineffectuality and all sorts of desperate attempts to reach the golden goal by running with both feet in the air at the same time. Hoffe, like many another man, is neither a genius nor a hack. He is simply a talented fellow with all of a talented fellow's shortcomings. Now he can write well, and then he cannot write at all—and, as is the case with talent ever, his manuscripts are a compound of both the now and the then. He cannot pull the bad up to the good, try as he may. Nor is he hack to let the good fall back into practical harmony with the bad. He hangs thus in the purgatory where mere talent is condemned always to hang. Furthermore, Hoffe is by nature a senti-

mentalist. The cast of all his writing is, at bottom, excessively sentimental. But, like nine-tenths of the talented sentimentalists since the beginning of day, he tries periodically—and intelligibly—to protect himself from the sneers of professional masculinity by shifting his mood to the heavily sardonic, much as an expert female impersonator swings off his wig at the final curtain, struts elaborately after the manner of a longshoreman, shows his biceps, and growls a "Thank you" out of the corner of his mouth.

In Hoffe's case, we have a nice talent for sentimental writing, a lesser talent for light irony, and an even lesser talent for imagining vigorous dramatic situations, and the result, when these talents and incapacities come into collision in the form of a play, is one of the peculiarly uneven manuscripts that give the reviewers pause. What we thus get is a manuscript, fundamentally weak, with sudden and surprising scenes of sentimental excellence lapsing alternately into lack-lustre play-writing and very fragile but still engaging satire.

### § 20

*Andreyev.*—Since I entertain a certain measure of respect for Andreyev's familiar play, "Athema," I should like to pretend that it constitutes

an interesting evening in the theatre, but I cannot. While, quite true, it is the sort of drama that makes a very profound impression upon Drama Leaguers, East Side culture shoppers, super-literary dramatic critics and others who believe that a play is great in the degree that it is theatrically boresome, it simply tortures the rest of us who regard the stage less as a hypodermic syringe for the painful injection of pseudo-metaphysical and philosophical dolours than as a funnel for the inspiriting pleasures to be derived from unpretentious and provocative beauty. It is another of those partly meritorious Russian novels arbitrarily thrown back of the footlights and told to conduct itself as if it were a play. It is lethargic, repetitious; it lacks dramatic fluidity; it arrives finally at its destination with shoes worn completely to holes.

The theme you know. Anathema, spirit of doubt, challenge and evil, seeks the truth of God's grace and of man's destiny. His search, through the medium of a humble patriarch who is put to death by the very persons who have profited by his bounty, is baffled, vain. What is the answer to the eternal riddle? The answer is that there is no answer. This theme Andreyev has handled in terms of "Faust" rewritten by a Bolshevik Dunsany, with none of Dunsany's fertile fancy and none of Dunsany's penetrating ironic humor. The

play is profoundly imagined and superficially executed. It contains several excellent passages of dramatic writing and one or two dramatic situations, but these are separated by long arid stretches of unimaginative desert land. The manuscript, as a thing of the theatre, does not move. It halts on every corner to scowl and make speeches. Among the Russians who come to mind as perhaps most aptly suited to the dramatization of Andreyev's theme is Lermontov—he possesses the very qualities that the play presently is deficient in: the quality of mystic fancy, the quality of dramatically roundabout yet theatrically direct suggestion, and the quality of poetic semi-realism. Andreyev has written his play with indignation; it would be a more convincing play, I daresay, if written with something of an amiable snicker. Lermontov, like Sologub, is not without that snicker. And than this there is nothing more valuable dramatically, as Shakespeare even in his great tragic moments knew.

### § 21

*Zoë Akins.*—The plays of Zoë Akins are, with two eminently admirable exceptions, servant-girl drama written for ladies and gentlemen. That, at least, is their texture, although usually there

is need for the ladies and gentlemen to be either under twenty, in which event the plays may conceivably impress them as at once fresh and poignantly romantic, or over sixty, in which event they will serve wistfully to recall to them their early days of theatregoing. To those of an age between, Miss Akins' exhibitions will be merely overly bedight and gilded versions of the ancient fable of the celebrated courtesan, the wealthy protector and the young lover, made considerably nonsensical by the author's apparently ineradicable relish for what is known in the vernacular as spending names. It is Miss Akins' idea of elegance and rich dramatic atmosphere casually to mention a king, a grand duke or a duchess every third minute, and to embellish the intervening spaces of time with allusions to champagnes of rare vintage, *plats* of infinite *aux* and *à la's*, million dollar yachts, priceless strings of pearls, Monte Carlo, the Riviera, and the various royal families of Europe. (Apparently the first thing that Miss Akins does when she starts to write a play is to collect a lot of menus from the Ritz, the Colony, the Crillon and the back of the late Ward McAllister's book, "Society As I Have Found It," discern the fanciest *pièces* thereon, and copy them into her manuscript. Throughout her plays, the corks of Pol Roger 1911 pop ferociously off-stage

and Sévres plates rattle superbly under their burden of Beluga caviar, pâté de fois gras Côte d'Azur and breast of guinea hen Valenciennes et St. Cyr. Miss Akins is a good playwright, but she is a very much better headwaiter.) As further evidence of her recognition of *bienséance* and intimate acquaintance with the refinements of exclusive *milieux*, she fills her plays with tony French garçons, of whom there are at least a half dozen to every person at table and who elaborately bow themselves in and out at the nose-in-air beck and nod of an extra-elegant *maître d'hôtel*, baccarat, pools of goldfish, Dimitrino cigarettes with rose-leaf tips, lace napkins with the morning chocolate, imperial suites of thirty and forty rooms, and casual references to those personal peculiarities of certain kings and queens that have come to her notice while she was hanging out for the week-ends at their palaces. Miss Akins is a talented playwright—one of the most talented that has thus far shot across the American scene—but she is rapidly corrupting that talent with her absurd backstairs affectations. Her plays begin to remind one of nothing quite so much as a winsome little country girl in calico and black cotton stockings who pins a portière to her rear, struts majestically through the old family parlor with a brass curtain pole and assures her elders, upon

their somewhat puzzled but still amused interrogation, that she is the Queen of Sheba.

### § 22

*O'Neill.*—Whenever, as in the case of such of his plays as “Welded” and “The First Man,” Eugene O’Neill tries on the whiskers of Strindberg, the results are singularly unfortunate. Following the technic of Strindberg, O’Neill sets himself so to intensify and even hyperbolize a theme as to evoke the dramatic effect from its overtones rather than, as in the more general manner, from its undertones. His attempt, in a word, is to duplicate the technic of such a drama as “The Father,” the power of which is derived not by suggestion and implication but from the sparks that fly upward from a prodigious and deafening pounding on the anvil. The attempt, as I have said, is a failure, for all one gets in O’Neill’s case is the prodigious and deafening pounding. The sparks simply will not come out. Now and again one discerns something that looks vaguely like a spark, but on closer inspection it turns out to be only an imitation lightning-bug that has been cunningly concealed in the actors’ sleeves. O’Neill, in such instances, always goes aground on the rocks of exaggeration and over-

emphasis. His philosophical melodrama is so full of psychological revolver shots, jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge, incendiary Chinamen, galloping hose-carts, forest fires, wild locomotives, saw-mills, dynamite kegs, time fuses, mechanical infernal machines, battles under the sea, mine explosions, Italian blackhanders, last-minute pardons, sinking ocean liners and fights to the death on rafts that the effect is akin to trying to read a treatise on the theme on a bump-the-bumps. He rolls up his sleeves and piles on the agony with the assiduity of a coal-heaver. He misjudges, it seems to me completely, the Strindberg method. That method is the intensification of a theme from within. O'Neill intensifies his theme from without. He piles psychological and physical situation on situation until the structure topples over with a burlesque clatter. Strindberg magnified the psyche of his characters. O'Neill magnifies their actions.

### § 23

*A Typical Lady Poet-Playwright.*—Had the management of the Provincetown Theatre exercised the foresight and sagacity to wax the floor it might have converted Miss Mercedes de Acosta's unsuccessful costume play, "Sandro Botticelli,"

into a very successful fancy dress ball. For while almost all the elements necessary to a good play were lacking, almost all the elements necessary to the good ball were present. The costumes were elaborate and very lovely; the lighting was soft and prettily colored; the ladies and gentlemen moved about with airy grace; the music was lilt-ing; the conversation was excessively dull. Miss de Acosta thus doubtless possesses all the qualifications for a hostess that she lacks as a play-wright. Her play is the kind of play a lady poet invariably elects as her form of self-indulgence and dissipation when she happens to be rich enough to privilege herself the luxury: a *smörgasbord* of actors dressed like a Fifth Avenue auction and basking in the glory of such names as Lorenzo dei Medici, Leonardo da Vinci, Leo Batista Alberti, Fra Filippo Lippi, Sandro Botticelli and Simonetta Vespucci ("by courtesy of Lee Shubert"), of elaborate red and gold furniture borrowed from the homes and ateliers of the lady poet's friends, of manifold eulogies to the beauty of Italy addressed with spread arms to the blue-lighted backdrop, of countless similes comparing the heroine with the stars, the moon, ivory, the wash of the sapphire sea upon coral islands, various flowers, the tinkle of distant guitars, a slim silver knife cutting the springtime twilight, the tall

grass blown before the noonday wind, the pellucid mountain brook, the sheen and pallor of a vagrant goldfish's breath, etc., etc., of much hot love-making in which figure such familiar morsels d'amour as "I am all afire with your beauty" and "Your body intoxicates me," and of one scene, prepared for with the perspirations of a thousand brewery-wagon horses, wherein the heroine who has promised at the end of Act I to come to the artist's studio on the morrow and pose for him in all the breath-taking beauty of her nudity—"I, the proudest woman in all Italy; I whose body no man has seen; I will do this for you!"—wherein this heroine duly shows up in Act II and, to the breathless nervousness and incandescent palpitations of the audience, mounts a bench, casts aside her velvet cloak, and devilishly exhibits about three inches of bare shoulder-blade. On certain occasions the rich lady poet varies this scene and incorporates in its stead one designed similarly to jounce prosy everyday folk wherein either a Fourteenth Century duchess conceives a lustful passion for a bell-hop with a name that resembles that of a California Chianti, or wherein a rough and very hairy crusader named Ramon the Bold steals and seduces the fair virgin princess Guatemala.

Miss de Acosta, like her sister poets, is ap-

parently much concerned about Beauty. She would have us regard her as a priestess of Beauty in a cold, material Anglo-Saxon world. Her negotiation of her rite takes the form of appropriating the theme of Maurice Hewlett's "Quattrocentisteria," a number of properties from the charitable David Belasco, a copy of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" by her husband, Mr. Abram Poole, a score or two of similes from Frank Wilstach, a deep blue Urban bunchlight and an uptown professional actress, and putting these elements in combination on the stage of a converted dwelling-house in Greenwich Village. Since the palpable object of Miss de Acosta's play—save I endow the lady with a sense of theatrical practicability that she does not possess—was to achieve an auditorium thrill by getting her heroine, in the person of Miss Eva Le Gallienne, to bare her anatomy to the public view, I may, as a theatrical critic, be privileged a personal complaint on being asked to travel way down to Macdougal Alley for any such spectacle, even were it to be, which it was not, vouchsafed *in toto*. If Miss Le Gallienne wishes to undress uptown, and in a warm and comfortable theatre with a soft seat, I shall be glad to run around some off evening and pass upon her talents. But I consider it asking altogether too much to bid me voyage several miles into the

far, chill reaches of Washington Square for the purpose. I may say that I can think of certain other cases in which I wouldn't mind a trip as far as Brooklyn, but that is beside the present point.



CERTAIN FAMILIAR TYPES OF  
ENTERTAINMENT.



## § 1

*The Biographical Play.*—The so-called biographical play vouchsafes more often than not less a biography of its central personage than a standard model melodrama laboriously hitched to that personage and given a deceptive air of authenticity by throwing back the scenery the appropriate number of years, causing the leading actor to deliver the most fetching *mots* of the illustrious deceased, and printing a bewildering note in the program to the effect that while certain liberties with history have been taken by the dramatist, the latter's aim has been not to record historical events exactly but to show the reaction of the central character to these events. In other words, to draw an accurate metaphysical and psychological picture of the central character by showing how he would have conducted himself had these events been other than they actually were and had he then so conducted himself. The result we have long been familiar with. What confronts our vision is a “biographical” drama in which Disraeli is displayed as the hero of a Third

Avenue melodrama with Madison Avenue furniture whose famous East India policy apparently centres upon getting the *ingénue* happily married; in which Voltaire is exhibited as the hero of a Stanley J. Weyman red velvet and candelabra opus who devotes his life to changing from one Sulka dressing gown to another, making epigrams and saving the *jeune premier* from jail; and in which Mary Queen of Scots is shown as the heroine of an old Mildred Holland historical tub-thumper with the tub hidden under a cretonne covering and the thumping muffled to a degree in counterfeit prosody. These gentle works are biographical plays very largely in the sense that "Shenan-dooah," with its amorous Sardoodledom interrupted by an actor in a blue suit astride a galloping nag, and "The White Feather," with the entire German navy bent upon blowing up a remote sea-coast house full of English actors, are historical plays. Such affairs are simply cheap fabrications of the showshop given a specious importance, in the instance of the so-called biographical plays, by naming the star actor Cromwell or Disraeli instead of Major-General Sir Montmorency Pinero or the Hon. Gilbert Prothero Sutro, M.P., and getting the orchestra to play the tunes of the period during the entr'actes or, in the second instance, by outfitting the Sardou characters with the uniforms

of the army of the home nation, save Scarpia, who is dressed up as a captain in the army of the enemy (he is usually given heavily to drink and covets the home major's wife), by further injecting into the proceedings a rousing speech to the effect that the home nation is in the war business for Jesus' sake and not for mere gain, like the enemy, and by winding up the evening by sneaking the orchestra back stage to play the national anthem as the final curtain descends.

The biographical play, even where it is of a considerably higher level than those which I have been discussing, is theatrically seldom satisfactory, and for a simple reason. It either presupposes a quite thorough acquaintance with its subject on the audience's part, which the audience does not possess and which hence makes a great deal of the play vague and unintelligible to it—or it presupposes no acquaintance at all, or at best very little, which contrives to present the central historical character to the audience's mind as a mere character in a conventionally fictitious play somewhat puzzlingly given to confounding what might ordinarily be a fictitious play—and a comprehensible one—by lugging in disturbing semi-recognizable allusions to persons and events in which the audience is not in the least interested. John Drinkwater, to a degree in his "Abraham

Lincoln," and Sacha Guitry, to a much greater degree in his "Pasteur," have got around the problem by abandoning the biographical drama part of the business to a very considerable extent and centering their attention upon the biography of the chief protagonist. They have wisely elected to show not Lincoln's and Pasteur's reactions to historical events so much as the reactions of these historical events to Lincoln and Pasteur. They have given us infinitely less a biography of the drama of these men's times, as their colleagues have done in their biographical plays, than a biography of the men themselves. These men they have illumined as if with staccato pocket-flashes, in a succession of sharp cut-outs, in a series of fleeting and momentary glimpses. The effect, in Guitry's play much more pointedly than in Drinkwater's, is like a rapid turning of the leaves of an articulate album. It accomplishes by inference and suggestion all that the other biographical dramatists have failed to accomplish by elaborate meticulousness, a careful smoothing out of rough edges and \$30,000 worth of scenery, costumes and properties. It is thus, in the words of the estimable Major Owen Hatteras, that we achieve our fullest conception of a personage. "Biography fails, like psychology," he has observed, "because it so often mistakes complexity for illumination.

Its aim is to present a complete picture of a man; its effect is usually to make an impenetrable mystery of him. The cause of this, it seems to me, lies in the fact that the biographer always tries to explain him utterly, to account for him in every detail, to give an unbroken coherence to all his acts and ideas. The result is a wax dummy, as smooth as glass, but as unalive as a dill pickle. It is by no such process of exhaustion that we get our notions of the people we really know. We see them, not as complete images, but as processions of flashing points. Their personalities, so to speak, are not revealed brilliantly and in the altogether, but as shy things that peep out, now and then, from inscrutable swathings, giving us a hint, a suggestion, a moment of understanding. . . .”

## § 2

*The Farce.*—The farce of twenty-five years ago consisted chiefly of a set of false whiskers or a woman’s dress which promptly deceived all the characters on the stage into believing that the leading man was his own grandfather or aunt from Australia, and of a great climax to the second act achieved by getting all the characters suddenly to yell their lines at the tops of their voices, the while the leading lady fainted on the sofa at right

and the butler fell down stairs at left. The farce of today, on the other hand, consists chiefly of a comic butler, given to much eye-winking innuendo, a door leading suggestively to a bedroom, a phonograph that plays one of Fyscher's amorous ditties, three naughty epigrams paraphrased from Sacha Guitry, a loud laugh cabbaged from some comedy produced in Budapest during the previous summer, a suit of lady's pajamas made by Paul Poiret, the second act curtain from "Divorçons" to the accompaniment of the first act tag from Felix Gandera's "L'Alcove de Marianne," a carafe of whiskey and two siphons, and an obstreperous minor character named Lulu in a red dress.

### § 3

*The Dream Play.*—The dream play is very often the refuge and artful dodge of the lazy and unimaginative playwright. He knows that in a dream play he can get away with nine-tenths of the things he couldn't possibly get away with in a play that was not a dream play. The very facts that the leading character is dreaming the body of the play and that a dream is a wild and crazy thing anyhow let him off with a lot of wild and crazy things for which otherwise even a special matinée

producer would boot him swiftly in the pantaloons. He can let construction, form and most of the other things that comprise dramatic technic, and that take a deal of time to learn, shift for themselves, and do very much as he pleases. A dream play in the hands of a dramatic artist often turns out to be a very beautiful thing, but a dream play in the hands of subterfuge and imaginative charlatanism is always a perfectly transparent and contemptible cheating of authentic fancy.

#### § 4

*The Moving Picture.*—Every now and then some moving picture company gathers together the parts of a dozen or more films that have been trimmed out of as many of their releases, hires someone to write titles and inserts that will give the rubbish a semblance of continuity, and, after giving a \$5000 dinner at the Ritz at which Mr. Will Hays emphatically reiterates his conviction that the movies are a great art, puts out the result under some such title as “The Snare of Satan,” “Why Women Fall,” or “The Lotus of Limehouse.” Let us say, for example, that the company finds that it has left over 300 feet of “Goldfarb of the Royal Mounted,” 400 feet of “Cinderella of the Harem,”

620 feet of the great moral and religious feature, "Sex Love," adapted from Louisa M. Alcott's "Little Women," 508 feet of "Hurricane Blumenthal's Gal," 250 feet of the excruciating "comic" called "Grandpa's Neuralgia," 740 feet of "The Sheik of Egyptium," 425 feet of the sensational sermon-drama, "Are You My Mother?", 312 feet of "Passion's Glow," 514 feet of the super-film spectacle, "The Civilizing of Civilization"—showing the progress of humanity from the Fall of Pompeii to the erection of the Dewey Arch and covering such important and acutely relevant historical events as Marc Antony's seduction by Cleopatra, Louis XIV's seduction by Madame de Montespan, Louis XV's seduction by Du Barry, Rizzio's seduction by Mary Stuart, Peter the Great's seduction by Catherine, Jean Jacques Rousseau's seduction by Madame de Warens, Shakespeare's seduction by Anne Hathaway, Jonathan Swift's seduction by Esther Vanhomrigh, Shelley's seduction by Mary Wollstonecraft, Henry IV's seduction by the Marquise de Verneuil, Goethe's seduction by Christiane Vulpius, Anatol's seduction by Cora, Bianca, Emilie, Annie, Elsa and Ilona, Paul's seduction in "Three Weeks," and the Stanford White case—together with several hundred feet each out of "Little Miss Sunshine," "Is Your Wife Married?" and "The Law of the Prairie." The company now goes over

to the Hotel Astor to lunch and decides that if this assorted material is pieced together and if the theatre lobbies are decorated with anchors and seaweed to give the proper South Seas atmosphere, an excellent and very recherché selling title would be "Alaska Amour," the Messrs. Ginsberg, vice-pres., and Wohlheimer, sec'y., dissenting, on the ground that there is no connection between the South Seas and Alaska and hence casting their vote for "The Sheik of the Sahara." Luncheon adjourned, the company gets into touch with Mr. C. Anderson Waffel, the eminent scenarist known to the literary and dramatic world as the author of the playlet, "The Burglar and the Piano-mover," which enjoyed a successful run over the Pantages Circuit in 1907, and commissions him to get busy with the débris and turn out a screen masterpiece. Mr. Waffel thereupon goes over to the Public Library, gets a copy of Sir Walter Scott's "Kenilworth," steals the basic plot, lays the scene in the Canadian Northwest, writes the titles and subtitles in the language of Longfellow and the inserts in the language of Ring Lardner, and turns over his work to Mr. Silverfisch, pres. and treas. The picture is then duly released and makes a critical hit as great as the size of the advertisements that the company puts in the newspapers.

## § 5

*The Mystery Play.*—The average mystery play runs true to form in that the explanation of the mystery vouchsafed to the audience is generally considerably more mysterious than the proceedings leading up to it. The playwrights in these cases usually resort to the trick of concealing the holes in this explanation by having the actors rattle it off so quickly that the ear of the audience gets dizzy and cannot make head or tail of it. There is another type of mystery play which winds up with an explanation so elaborate, so thorough and so satisfying, that the mystery which has preceded it seems extremely feeble in comparison.

## § 6

*The Polite Comedy.*—For all its intense effort at modernity, the average American polite comedy of today is little more than an inferior English drawing-room comedy of two score years ago given a speciously contemporaneous air by embellishing it with allusions to jazz music, Freud and Mah Jong and with such bits of Prohibition stage business as an elaborate smacking of the lips upon the tasting of illicit schnapps.

## § 7

*The Actress-Made Play.*—Actresses usually keep scrapbooks of all the plays in which they have acted. Occasionally one of them goes so far as to dramatize the scrapbook in the form of a synthetic vessel for her own particular stage use. Into it she puts all the materials of her past plays that were dearest to her actress heart, and a lot out of the plays of her sister stars, to say nothing of a few salty touches of the Broadway hokum for good measure. In it the actress vouchsafes to herself the opportunity to reveal herself to her audience at the outset as a poor, abused, bedraggled and illiterate young girl and, at the finish, as a regally accoutred creature with the mien of a queen, the wit of a Madame de Staël, and yet, with it all, the same heart of gold that was hers in the humbler day. We see again the sordid surroundings of eight-thirty and the gilt magnificence of eleven. We hear the heroine gradually being persuaded to say “he taught me” instead of “he learned me.” We hear the lesson in French, with the comic byplay. We see the brave little crippled sister and give ear to her thus: “Oh, doctor, do you really think I’ll be able to walk again like other girls and be able to feel the green grass under my feet—and maybe

be able to dance and sing? Wouldn't it be wonderful—too wonderful! If I pray to God, dear doctor, do you think He'll let you cure me?" (Yes, little girl, never fear; you will be miraculously cured at exactly 10:45 P. M., when with a cry you will fling aside your crutch and braces and shout aloud: "Look! Look! It's true; it's true! I can walk—*I can walk!*") We see the love scene in the moonlight; we hear the heroine's confession of past sin; we hear the manly hero's asseveration that all that means naught to him—"It is not what you were; it is what you are today, darling. Through the murk of the past I can see the virgin purity of your untarnished soul." We have the sudden thunderstorm to heighten a dramatic effect, the hurdy-gurdy that grinds out a gay tune in the street below as a sardonic accompaniment to the heroine's woes, the jollity and laughter of passing mi-carême revelers while tragedy occupies the immediate foreground, and the heroine's solicitude for a wounded little bird by way of establishing her innate goodness of heart. We hear the naughty epithet duly hurled at the heroine by the villain by way of dredging up the necessary box-office blush out front. And we get, seriatim, all the stencils such as "If God wants poor people to have so many babies, why doesn't He look out for them after they're born

and not let so many of them die?" and "Take me; I am yours, body and soul; do with me as you will; only—only—I cannot marry you; I cannot be your wife. Think of your name, your career, what your friends would say! I love you too much to let you sacrifice yourself! I love you, Michel, I love you. . . ."

Or we have the actress hailed as the most seductive, the most *charmante*, the most beautiful, the most succulent wench in all Europe. She is wooed vainly by rich men and poor men, by kings and emperors, by admirals and sailors from the four corners of the world. But bah! She snaps her fingers at them one and all. A millionaire is naught to her; a king a mere popinjay. Love? She emits a scornful snort. There is no man who can resist her allure. She is like wine. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Wops, Spaniards, Greeks—they fall at her feet like so many autumn leaves. For is she not Mignonette d'Anchois, the true plum because of whom trembling dukes and lords, earls and mere sirs have spilled their blood and soup? There she reclines, the beauteous, the inflammatory Mignonette, upon the sofa of gold. A dozen footmen attend her, two dozen butlers bump into one another fetching her the cards of despairing suitors. Yet does the gorgeous one merely smile a fatigued and languorous smile,

and restlessly tap the toe of her golden slipper upon the golden edge of the golden sofa. Let the Comtesse Port du Salut revile her if she will, jealous hussy! Let the Duchesse de Gruyère say what she may against her, acidulous *hanswurstin!* Is not she, Mignonette, the pet of monarchs, the rage at the Opera, the sought-after of the whole world? *Ja.* The Riviera, Paree, la belle France—they cry for her as children cry for Castoria. . . . And does the good actress enjoy it, this bosh? I ask you, did Booker T. Washington enjoy watermelon?

### § 8

*The Amnesia Play.*—The amnesia play may regularly be distinguished as that type of entertainment in which the leading man cannot remember who he was or what he did before the first act curtain went up, and who indicates his bepuzzlement by stopping suddenly short in the middle of every third sentence and staring hard at whichever actor or actress happens to be on the stage at the moment.

### § 9

*The Burlesque Show.*—Let us take a look in at the old Olympic Theatre down in Fourteenth

Street. Unlike the affectedly tony Columbia Theatre uptown, the Olympic remains true to first principles and devotes itself not, as in the case of the Columbia, to fifth-rate imitations of third-rate Broadway music shows, but to pure, unadulterated and heart-warming old knock 'em down and drag 'em out burlesque. Here is rosemary of the palmy days. Not a bustle is safe from the slap-slat, not a face is spared from the seltzer-siphon, not a wriggle is omitted from the cooch dance, not a bass-drum remains whole when the final curtain comes down. Here still is the good old "Casino at Monte Carlo" with the Rocky Mountains appropriately figuring on the backdrop and with Izzy, Pat and Bozo talking successively into the telephone and receiving, respectively, a spray of flour, a squirt of water, and—ah, Bozo, thou lucky rogue!—a glass of foaming lager. Here still is the good old "Beach at Ostend" with O. U. Kidd and I. M. Woozy coming suddenly, to their horror, upon their wives and fooling the latter by donning aprons and passing themselves off on the ladies as waiters. And here still is the good old "Artist's Studio" with the eight ex-chambermaids arrayed in lobster-colored fleshings, their right arms curved with painstaking grace over their heads and representing—in the elegance of the program—"The Birth of the Le Printemps."

Once again, as in the old days, we encounter I. Cheatem ("and he does," confides the program), Willie Takitt ("a live wire"), Lotta Pepp ("full of ginger"), Mary Wise ("and she is"), together with all their old pals Ima Peach, Izzie Konshuss, Hamond Deggs, M. T. Noodle, G. Howe Smart, Lotta Jazz, Ann Jennue, Miss Taken, Miss Gotrox, Heeza Nutt, Sheeza Pippin, Fuller Bull ("poor but not proud") and his three brothers Fuller Laffs, Fuller Hopps and Fuller Proons, Otto Mobile, Miss Calla Number, Noah Lott, Helen B. Ware, I. Will B. Goode, Notter Bumm, Gotta Hare Lipp, O. U. Vampire and, last but not least, A. Kopp. What memories they awaken, these shadow Salvinis and Duses of the dramatic underworld! Who doesn't remember Heinie Dingelbender's "Papa, mama she sess you are some-of-a-peach," with papa Herman's indignant rejoinder, "*What* you sess she called me?" And who doesn't recall the scene wherein Mlle. Fifi, of the Boul' Mich', raises her skirt to insert a bill into her stocking, the while Herman and Heinie at stage left so strain themselves to view the revelation that they lose their balance and fall on top of each other? Then, too, the scene wherein our Heinie strolls drolly among the "Living Pictures," casting significant winks in the direction of the audience, pinching the most corpulent "picture" first

on the arm and then, upon no sign of life from the lady, on the youknow—and finally lying down on the floor to achieve a better view of the lovely subjects? What sweetness in the retrospect! What Art, as boyhood knew it!

Well, it is still all here at the Olympic, from the Gas House Quartette to the hoochie dance, from the venerable money-changing act to the floozie with the red necktie—how the exasperated Heinie doth glare at the fellow!—from the drop curtain with the chewing gum advertisements to the boy who sells boxes of candy in the aisles—“twenty-five cents—a quarter—a package, and a prize in every box.” The grand old smell of stale cigars and cigarettes, of cheap hair tonics and Third Avenue drug-store perfumery, of the hospitably near, frankly unabashed and doorless “Gent’s Walk”—it is present as it was when you and I were boys. The carpetless wooden floor, rich in homeric expectorations; the orchestra with the squeaky fiddle and indefatigable tapper on the triangle; the drop curtain that goes up like a man pulling an old-fashioned shirt over his head; the girls with no less than three solid gold teeth apiece—they, too, are present as in the dear, bygone days when we and all the world were young. It is all very gay, and just a bit sad. Where the sob-brothers of our American criticism are wont to

weep lustily over the touching splendors of John Barrymore, Elsie Janis, Reggie Sheffield, Vincent Serrano, Winifred Lenihan and Geoffrey Stein, I reserve my soul moisture for this drama of our far-off youth, the wistful echoes of which come down to us in these later and colder years. There is the touch *penseroso* in its memorable fanning of rears, in its cracking of bladders on pates, in its spacious pants and red under-lingerie and crêpe whiskers and pink wigs. It is rapidly being driven from the stage and into the discard by a Puritan censorship, a wave of dull Art, and a reduction in the personnel of the United States Navy. While it is yet here, let us enjoy it and, enjoying it, meditate upon the purple times when Harrison and Grover Cleveland yet held the White House, when the hanging out of the picture of a goat in front of the boulevard inns signalized the great annual dawn of reason, when our coins and currency still bore the faces of noble Indians instead of ignoble politicians, when shoes were polished by grinning, singing black native sons instead of by muttering alien followers of D'Annunzio, when it required an Alpenstock to climb into a barber's chair, when no one would eat a sausage because Leutgert had murdered his wife, when John Philip Sousa's hair was still black, when the smallest

church in every town was that of the Methodists—when we were still Americans.

### § 10

*“The — Girl.”*—They are all the same, these “The — Girl” musical comedies. The ingénue kicks out her right foot every time she sits down and addresses her father as Popsy. The juvenile, in the uniform of a naval lieutenant, wishing to be painstakingly precise in his pronunciation by way of pleasing the critics, negotiates such specimens as “I refuse to answer on advice of council.” The stagehands slowly fade the amber gelatine slides into purple as the sentimental songs get under weigh. The English comedian gets all mixed up when he tries to use American slang, and periodically, in his confusion, drops the monocle out of his eye. The head of a Prohibition organization is, after much eye-winking and hollow coughing, persuaded to take a drink, which he obviously relishes for all his elaborate pretense to the contrary. When the two young lovers are embracing each other in song on the sofa, the chorus tiptoes in and surprises them in time for the chorus. While the star, with her left foot at a sharp right angle from her ankle, sings a song

called "Just One Rose," she periodically smells at a rose, and at the chorus the girls come on with large roses sewed on their skirts. For the curtain to one of the acts, the star stands on a chair in the centre of the stage and acts as a pivot for the chorus girls, each of whom holds the end of a long piece of colored silk and circles around her. There is a song called "1908" in which the four male principals sway back and forth close to the footlights singing, "The women all wore wrappers and there weren't any flappers in good old Nineteen Eight," and verses of a kind. The heroine is a poor Italian girl of the lower East Side in the first act and a world-famous and expensively dressed prima donna in the last. The curtain of the second act goes up on the chorus dressed as maids. The song they sing is called "Dust Chasers." They accompany the lyrics with appropriate motions with feather dusters. The love songs sung by the heroine and the hero are entitled, "We are Sweethearts," "Till the End of Time" and "Bring Back Your Heart to Me." Another song, sung by the ingénue and the juvenile, is called "Cuddle Me Up," while still another is "The Raindrop and the Rose."

The only thing that distinguishes one of these "The — Girl" shows from another is the word that the producer thinks up to fill in the dash. After

the producer has thought up this descriptive word, his work is done. Now and again, true enough, some particularly enterprising producer ingeniously thinks up a plan to lend a novel touch to the proceedings by coating the dresses and back-drop in the "Little Hindu Glow-worm" number with radium paint, but generally the mere change of the word denoting what kind of girl it is is considered sufficient to fetch the customers. In the old days they used to exercise much more invention and would periodically change the word "girl" to "maid," but today they feel that there is no necessity for going to so much trouble.

The usual revue is no less stereotyped than these "The — Girl," musical comedies. The front curtain goes up and through the folds of a second hanging of rich maroon draperies steps a fat girl dressed as Pierrot who recites a salutatory poem about wine, women and song. The hangings then part and we have a back-drop representing Times Square by night and a song about Broadway being a fraud way but Broadway I love you. This is followed by a couple of proficient clog dancers drafted from the Loew circuit. The next item is a sketch called "A Man of Title," in which the titles of the best sellers are cleverly strung together in the form of a story. The curtains now close again and the Rath Brothers do their act. After

the Rath Brothers, we have a number called "Idylle du Hawaii," which is made up of a song about holding your palm in my palm underneath the South Sea palms, and a shimmy dance by a plump miss in a straw shirt. Item No. 7 is a sketch entitled "In 1932," in which a burglar is cleverly shown ransacking a house for a piece of coal. After this we get a fashion parade. Then comes a number called "The Parthenon of Venus," in which eight Amazons in pink tights recline languidly against tall white pillars, the while the leading lady—carried on in a sedan chair by four self-conscious Harlem coons—sings a song about sweet moon of love and passion shine on thee, shine on me. The other principal elements of the revue are a flight of steps down which an assortment of tall hussies dressed up like so many Chinese restaurants troop majestically at intervals of twenty minutes, a ballet in which a toe dancer whirls around rapidly a dozen times, tumbles in a heap and thus depicts, according to the program, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," one joke about the income tax and another about Mah Jong, a song number in which the coy girl star is flirtatiously chased around the stage by the male chorus in evening clothes, and a sketch in which an actress who bears a striking resemblance to George Bickel gives an imitation of Jeanne

Eagels by putting on a blonde wig and a pair of white cotton stockings and striking an attitude like Benny Leonard.

### § 11

*The Religious Play.*—The theatre play with the man of God for its hero generally follows a more or less set menu. It either pictures him as succumbing to the lure of the flesh, in the person of Kiki La Deauville, the celebrated danseuse, after he has taken to the cloth, or to the same lure, in the person of the exotic Lady Violet Tremaine, wife of Sir Hugh Tremaine, M.P., just before he has taken to the cloth and while making a stop-over at Damascus on his way to the Holy Land. When it does not move on these tracks, it exhibits him, to the accompaniment of the “Whither thou goest, I will go . . . thy people shall be my people” speech, following the beautiful pagan Analgésique into the arena, there to be devoured by Nero’s lions, or it pictures him as renouncing love and Mrs. Pat Campbell in time with a Wurlitzer organ and bringing down a tristful curtain by flinging his arms toward the back-drop whereon a stagehand has illuminated the Nile with a Klieg water effect. The clergymen of Henry Arthur Jones are so many matinée idols spouting Upton Sinclair or Emile

Coué, where those of Robert Hichens are so many spouting Elinor Glyn and Fanny Hill. Sudermann's Paradise-bookmakers are either German James A. Stillmans or Ziegfeld Billy Sundays, and William Vaughn Moody's a mixture of Schlatter, John. D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Walt Mason. The abbés of the French drama are merely Pinero actors in long black skirts. And Ibsen has committed the paradoxical blunder of giving Brand and Rosmer minds!

The lines of the churchly hero are, in the aggregate, either so many Sunday School mottoes or Hall Caine explosions. When they are not something like "God builds his temples on the ruin of churches, in the human heart," they are "Take me! I give my life, my will, my soul, to you! Only persuade me that I shall meet her again." And when they are not something akin to "I have sinned—as David sinned. It is my just sentence to go forth from you, not as your guide, your leader, your priest; but as a broken sinner, humbled in the dust before the Heaven he has offended," they may be relied upon to be something like "Be what you will, do what you will, go where you will—but, Glory, come back to me!"

The so-called Christ plays also generally follow—as the man of God plays—a more or less conventional schedule, and everyone does one of them

soon or late in life. They deal either with a male member of the Actors' Equity Association in a white Empire gown who appears suddenly behind a transparency above the bookcase, says "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" with the wailing lugubriousness of a homesick saxophone, and hence represents the Saviour, or with a white spotlight that suddenly shines through the window of some evil rathskeller, produces a strange hush among the assembled raucous bibuli and is proclaimed by the little crippled boy Gustav, in a tremulous whisper, to be Him. When the play doesn't treat of either of these, it generally has to do with showing what would happen to Christ were He to come to Great Neck, Long Island; with a pitch-dark stage apparently containing a modern scene and modern peoples which when it finally lights up is shown to be Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion—thus proving conclusively to the audience that Judas O'Grady and the Colonel are brothers under their skins; with an old Wilson Barrett tub-thumper wherein the arena has been transformed into a church, an off-stage melodeon substituted for the roaring of lions, and Marcus Superbus allusively renamed the Rev. Dr. Joseph Christy; with a theological chariot race; or, finally, with a rattling good old hoochie-coochie show palmed off on Dr. Frank Crane and the Church

White List by the shrewd device of laying the scene in Palestine, putting a line in the program to this effect: *Time: "The Beginning of the Christian Era,"* and naming the chorus men after the leading families of Long Branch, New Jersey, and the girls after so many French cordials.

### § 12

*The Wistful Melodrama.*—We are all familiar with the kind of melodrama that halts every once in a while to get a good cry out of the folks out front by talking wistfully of babies. Why an audience should get wet around the eyes at every allusion to a little one that clasps one's thumb in its dear little fist, I am sure I don't know. But then, I am a bachelor of long and honorable standing and hence a poor critic in such matters. Yet the fact remains that whenever there is a soft-voiced reference in drama to a babe that is to be born, or to the heroine's determination to live straight so that her boy may grow up to be proud of her, or to the tiny morsel that needs a mother's love, or to the circumstance that no one can resist the spectacle of a baby smiling in its sleep—that whenever this old hokum is trotted out, there is an accompaniment of idiotic sniffling. The melodrama in which this baby business figures is

generally found to be the kind in which the heroine begins to tell the story of her life in a prologue, in which the lights slowly go down, in which the stagehands then proceed to make a devil of a racket falling over tables and chairs, and in which, after the lights have come up again and the stagehands have rubbed liniment on their shins, we see the heroine minus her prologue gray wig prancing around as a young girl. The way to see the majority of such plays is to listen to the prologue, go back to one's club and return at quarter of eleven in time to catch the tail end of the plot in the epilogue. All that one misses in the interim, in nine out of ten of the pieces, is the scene wherein the poor heroine is cast off by her rich husband or lover, the scene wherein she stands at the cross-roads leading this way to righteousness and that way to sin, and the scene in which the low comedy character, blessed with a heart of gold underneath his rough exterior, tells the heroine he will be glad to make her his wife and look tenderly after her and her baby, with the heroine pressing his hand and making the choking rejoinder: "I shall always remember you, Ladislaus; you are a good man—a good man." Otherwise, except perhaps for the scene in the bordello in which the heroine has been forced to find a home but with her virtue ever belligerently intact, the

club armchair will serve every bit as well as the theatre seat.

### § 13

*The French Revolution Play.*—The so-called French Revolution play is to be recognized as the exhibit in which some thirty actors and actresses, dressed up like a Palm Beach ball, are labeled chevalier, comtesse and duchesse, and spend three hours visiting their hauteur upon a young man dressed like Chauncy Olcott who is hence one of the plain people and who somewhat cryptically comes into his own at eleven o'clock by discovering that the evil and rascally Duc is his own father and that he is hence free to wed the fair and hitherto aloof Aline Vilmorin Plougastel de la Würzburger. There are several variations of and departures from this particular treatment of the theme that are no less familiar to the experienced theatregoer. Sometimes the exhibit ends with three-fourths of the cast walking heads erect, shoulders thrown back and faces transfigured by the holiness of the balcony spotlight, into the wings, there presumably to have their royal blocks chopped off by the guillotine. And at other times it ends with a duel in which Citoyen Kraus runs the Chevalier Gervais de Bockheister through the

gizzard and is borne aloft through the left upper entrance by triumphant Yiddish and Irish supers singing the "Marseillaise." There may be a portion of the public that still gets a thrill out of these plays, but I have not the honor to be of it. The duel, the thunderous denunciation from the stage of a theatre, the headlong dive out of a window to escape the officers of the king, the fair heroine dressed up like a pink satin telephone container, the knock-kneed gendarmes, the royalist villain with his London haircut showing at the back of his white wig, the elegant comtesse who has such a time sitting down without mussing up her ample skirts, the off-stage indignation of the stagehands, the coach that moves off at L. U. E. without the aid of horses other than those belonging to Stagehands' Local No. 64—all these, alas, no longer inflame me as once they did.



CERTAIN ACTORS AND ACTRESSES



## § I

*In Memoriam.*—Thirty thousand dollars' worth of New York theatregoers filled the Metropolitan Opera House to the ceiling to welcome the late lamented and incomparable Eleonora Duse in Ibsen's “The Lady from the Sea.” Thirty thousand dollars' worth of New York theatregoers, with a couple of hundred dollars' worth of critics thrown in for nothing, thunderously clapped out their tribute to the woman who was incontestably the greatest actress of her time. Thirty thousand dollars' worth of New York theatregoers sat enchanted before the soft and insinuating genius of the rare woman of Italy. And then, the next morning, about thirty-five dollars' worth of the critics who had been thrown in for nothing deplored the fact, while admitting the matchless talent of Duse, that she had, for all that undisputed talent, been, alas, unable to move them.

The final appearance of Duse in America was the occasion for some very excellent critical nonsense, of which the above is a succulent *schnitz'l*. Just how this thirty-five dollars' worth of critics

expected to be moved by an actress performing in a play that could not possibly move anybody without the aid of the whole Charles H. Fletcher factory passeth the understanding. If anyone has ever been moved by "The Lady from the Sea," which is beyond doubt one of the most supine and deadliest plays that Ibsen ever concocted, that person is yet to be heard from. The play may interest one as a student of dramatic literature, but it certainly cannot move one in the theatrical sense of the word. And to have asked Duse to move one in it was to ask for the moon.

It was to be expected, of course, that the great actress would be subjected to all sorts of idiotic fancy-writing, all sorts of hysterical hallelujahs and all varieties of soniferous pugh, at the expense of calm and dignified criticism. One was not disappointed. Instead of considering her as the acting genius which she was, and discussing that genius appositely, sanely and intelligently, the majority of her critics treated her for all the world like so many college boys with a mash on Marilynn Miller. Everything about her came in for an explosion of cocoanut grease—everything, that is, save her impressive acting. If the reviewers had only mentioned her legs, one might have substituted Miss Miller's name in the copy and the reviews would have done as well, so far as any

sound criticism of Duse went, for "Sally." Her interpretation of Ellida was dismissed in a sentence in favor of a dozen paragraphs of juvenile raving to the effect that, at sixty-three, she looked every bit as young as Marion Davies. Duse was the most wonderful actress of her day, but she was sixty-three years old, and looked it. Her technic was dismissed in a line or two and a dozen paragraphs given over instead to her "soul." Her tremendous competence was denied analysis and columns were given to her "aloof mystery," her "lonely, brooding nature" and her "immortal spirit." Thus was a great artiste, the greatest artiste of the theatre of her time, sacrificed to sentimental bosh. Her hands, as was to be anticipated, came in for all the familiar slobber. Whenever a critic attends a play in a foreign language with a conspicuous actor or actress heading the cast, doesn't understand so much as a single word of it, hasn't the faintest accurate notion of what it is all about and doesn't know what to say but has to say something to protect his job, he raves about the star's wonderful hands. Her voice, a truly beautiful voice, came in for the slobber no less, as, for example, this *escalope* from the esteemed *Times*: "It is the voice of a silver twilight, peopling an atmosphere Corot might have imagined with multitudinous accents of the human spirit. It is

crepuscular in its plaintive repinings, as for a day that is dead—as also in its accents of a soul that struggles forward toward a glory of light beyond the far horizon. No voice has been heard even faintly resembling hers—nor is such a voice ever likely to be heard again!” This is criticism *à la mode*. Instead of cool appraisal, we have *billet doux*. Instead of dignified praise, blandishment and dalliance.

Duse was the super-star of the theatre not because she did not look her age, not because her fingers happened to be long and tapering, not because her voice was what it was, not because newspaper interviewers bored the life out of her and she had the good sense to keep away from them, not because of anything to do with her soul, not because she built up around her a romantic legend, not because she preferred to stay at home and keep to herself (this the “mystery” which they speak of) instead of hanging around the Algonquin Hotel at lunch and taking part in Equity Ball pageants—but, very simply, because she worked at her art as no other actress save Bernhardt worked in her time, because she was gifted with the great sense always to play under a rôle and lift it up to the heights instead of playing down upon it from above—as most of her colleagues in histrionism are accustomed to do, be-

cause her mind was naturally sensitive to every turn of dramatic writing and, finally, because, unlike the overwhelming majority of actresses, she made her body the tool of that mind instead of making the mind the tool of her body. She acted from the head down, not from the feet up. Her body was eloquent because her legs had less to do with manipulating it and guiding it than her brain. She was the magnificent, the peerless creature of the theatre—even if she didn't look younger than Baby Peggy, even if her hands were, after all, just hands, and even if her voice, as a voice, didn't move one any more electrically than the voice of Ethel Barrymore.

Where Bernhardt gained every one of her greatest acting effects by a maximum of means, Duse achieved hers with a minimum. Hers was an economy not seen in the theatre of her period. She acted the way Joseph Conrad writes, with the brilliance born of an imaginative, coherent and exact parsimony. Nothing was wasted. But as the years sapped from her some of her earlier vigor, she came to resort to a series of admirable tricks—but mere tricks withal—to further her performances and get the effects that in the years before she was wont to achieve by sounder and subtler means. These tricks, such as the nervous, staccato cutting-in on speeches, the holding up of

a speech by way of gathering breath and the then sudden propulsion of the lines, the preparation for a speech by weaving its pattern in the air with the hands—these and the like were tokens of an ageing actress, an actress still radiant but moving on swiftly toward the sunset whose light already fell upon her, an actress who felt the need of props for a great but age-ridden mastery of her craft.

(Duse, parenthetically, had that one thing that every great actress has had, has and must have—something that may idiotically be described as a sad arm: that line of the arm that, when extended from the shoulder, has about it something of melancholy. The extended right arm of Eleonora Duse had in it all the tears of "Tristan and Isolde.")

It is a peculiarity of the critical estimate of Duse that she is generally agreed to have been the greatest actress of her day by two sets of critics who oddly arrive at this estimate with arguments and reasons that are diametrically opposed. I privilege myself the suspicion that this is why Duse is called the "mystery woman." She is a mystery because she is the only actress of our time who has been eulogized by half of the critics for one thing and by the other half for the exact opposite of that same thing. I have in mind specifically her performances of the mother in Gallarati-Scotti's

pious claptrap, "Cosi Sia." In London, when she last performed the rôle at the New Oxford, she played it in the spirit of a tigress who, suddenly 'wakened from sleep, snaps out a flaming snarl of defiance. This mood of defiance gave way in turn to an impassioned, nay almost a frenzied, faith, a sullen stubbornness, a burst of heartrending appeal and, finally, a despairful agony of self-immolation. The London critics hailed the performance as the acme of intelligent and acute interpretation and Duse as the peerless actress of the stage. In New York, when she performed the same rôle at the Century, she played it in the spirit of an imperturbable sexagenarian who accepts her mission coolly, calmly. This mood of resignation gave way in turn to a resigned, nay almost a melancholy, faith, a complacent sweetness, a passive acceptance of abuse and, finally, a welcome and highly comfortable surrender to fate. The New York critics hailed the performance as the acme of intelligent and acute interpretation and Duse as the peerless actress of the stage.

Now surely, since "Cosi Sia" and the rôle no less are admitted, without dissenting voice, to be the veriest theatrical flapdoodle, and since, as in the instance of finer drama and finer rôles, two interpretations so violently, even absurdly, antagonistic are hardly to be reconciled—surely some-

thing must, to put it mildly, be a trifle askew. The truth is perhaps not far to seek. It is not that the eminence of the Italian actress is critically arrived at from two different and each in themselves possibly valid points of view; it is that her eminence—an eminence rightly won over a long period of years and with an incontrovertible talent—has been taken for granted even when her immediate performances were such as to give the more judicious prolonged pause. I believe, with my colleagues, that Duse was the greatest of the actresses of her period; I believe, further, that the performance of "Cosi Sia" which this greatest of actresses gave in London was a superlatively fine performance; but I also believe that the performance of the same play which this greatest of actresses gave in New York would have disgraced the rankest amateur. It was grotesquely out of key with the play—as grotesquely out of key as her London performance was in key; it was slipshod, careless; it was downright lazy and cheating. In a word, Duse loafed on the job. For in the audience at the Century Theatre there was no Maurice Baring to catch her napping, no Chaliapin or Walkley or Archer or any other fully experienced and understanding soul to catch on to her and give her away. And she seemed to know it. Just a lot of American boobs. Just a

lot of poor, affected suckers. The night she opened at the Metropolitan, she took no chances. Her Ellida Wangel was tremendous, as it was tremendous in London. Nor did she take any chances with her second audience, the audience, that is, at the second play in her repertoire. And here once again her Mrs. Alving had all the old greatness. But then—what was the use of spreading one's self for these Americans?—then came the bald let-down. The money was in; why bother? The greatest actress in the world—and she was greatest—deserved her little joke on these Americans and their—what do you call them?—critics. And the greatest actress in the world had it.

## § 2

*Walter Hampden.*—For the last three or four years, though my personal attendance upon his different acting performances has failed to convince me, I have been receiving on the average of once a week printed circulars from Mr. Walter Hampden telling me how good he is. It has been, I confess, a bit disturbing. I would go to the theatre, sit studiously through this and that performance of his, come away with an extremely dubious impression of his talents, and then the

next morning wake up to find a circular in my mail assuring me that both Mr. Clayton Hamilton and the dramatic critic of the Horsecough, Virginia, *News-Leader* regarded him, to say the least, as the equal of Salvini. Mr. Hampden has, I figure, spent fully thirty dollars on stamps, and fully one hundred dollars on half-tones and circulars, in an effort to persuade me to let himself and his admirers make up my mind for me in respect to his genius. Yet I have been, I fear, most stubborn and not a little objectionable in my impoliteness. It wasn't that I didn't try to be otherwise. After a particularly well-printed and beautiful circular arrived, I would time and again go back and have another look at the gentleman by way of trying to determine the reasons for my own apathy and, no doubt, ignorance. Surely, thought I, if many famous authorities like the critic for the Horsecough, Virginia, *News-Leader* and Mr. Towse, of the New York *Evening Post* are firmly convinced that Mr. Hampden is an actor of the royal line, there must be something radically wrong with me if he seems to me to a mere amalgam of forum reader and ham. But still I could not convince myself. I saw a Hamlet, a Macbeth and an Othello that were intelligent, but a Hamlet, a Macbeth and an Othello that were theatrically and dramatically as cold and unimpressive as so many

college professors' essays on those characters. I saw a Petruchio that was essentially a Hamlet in a costume of gay hue—nothing more. I saw, before these, a Manson that was just a Methodist clergyman with rouge on his cheeks and with his eyelashes smeared with mascaro. I heard, again, Shakespeare read, and read well, but I did not see him acted.

And then came another expensive circular, followed by another and followed in turn by still another, announcing that Mr. Hampden was to do Cyrano. I may, under the circumstances, be forgiven for having pictured a Cyrano who would have all the poetic fire of a Sapolio rhyme, all the powerful sweep of a whisk-broom, all the heroic magnificence and purple gesture of—but enough of simile. Thus prejudiced—but fortifying myself against a too great prejudice by another perusal of the encomiastic circulars—I went to the theatre. And in that theatre I saw the Cyrano of all our finest fancies, the Cyrano that Mansfield failed to convey even to the impressionable and easy young man that was I at the time, a Cyrano stepped brilliantly, dazzlingly, out of the heart and pages of Rostand—a Cyrano, in short, that came as close to the ideal Cyrano as closeness well can come. Where was the college grind, the stiff minuet body that vainly, humorously, essayed to

swing itself into the waltz measures of great poetic dramatic literature, the forum reader in whose mouth moon-bathed verse became so much dialectics—where was this Hampden of the years before in this Hampden who, there before us, was a truly gusty, a truly moving, a truly flashing, blazing and radiant romantic actor? There was no sign of him, not a trace. In his place was the Hampden of all the Horsecough and Hamilton and Towse ecstasies and eulogies, the mythical Hampden suddenly come to dramatic life. The expensive circul-lars had found truth at the end of the long road of their wholly absurd, if honest and well-meant, exaggerations. Hampden was at last an actor. And this Cyrano of his is one of the most completely meritorious performances that an actor of his time and my own has contributed to the American theatre.

Yet, even in the instance of this excellent performance of the Rostand masterpiece, the old low comedy note was not lacking from the comments of the Hampden Social and Marching Club. In a number of cases, the encompassing eulogies were so excessively horticultural that the falling petals covered the ground for miles 'round. Some of the choicest of these associated petals may be found in Mr. Hamilton's preface to Brian Hooker's praiseworthy transposition of the

“Cyrano” text into English. Heaving a grandmotherly sigh for the days when the Rostand play was new—“the brave days, indeed, when the world was not yet out of joint,” the good Hamilton continues thus: “It was the time of the Spanish-American war, a knightly contest for a noble cause, in which we were fighting against gentlemen, not Germans!” One may readily enough allow with Colonel Hamilton that we Americans in the Spanish-American war were fighting against gentlemen but, in view of the fact that the odds in advance were something like one thousand to one in the favor of us Americans, one may privilege one’s self some speculation as to the opinion that the Spaniards hold in the matter.

### § 3

*La Fiske*.—Mrs. Fiske, far-famed as the most intellectual actress on the American stage, continues to produce herself in utterly worthless plays the utter worthlessness of which she continues in a measure artfully to conceal from her audiences by speaking in a voice so low and with an articulation so indistinct that it is quite impossible to make head or tail out of the proceedings. It is doubtless this sagacity and shrewd showmanship on Mrs. Fiske’s part that have earned her her enviable intel-

lectual *kudos*, since were she ever to forget herself for a few moments and speak clearly and intelligibly—as some unintellectual colleague such as, say, Miss Barrymore, speaks—and so let the public onto the nature of the plays in which she appears and to which she lends her intellectual imprimatur, it is reasonably certain that her fine scholarly reputation would be snatched from her brow and promptly passed on to Miss Faire Binney.

It is the easiest thing in the world to gain a reputation for wisdom if one confines one's self to the company of, and association with, half-wits. One's eminence, paraphrasing Mill, is thus solely due to the flatness of the surrounding heads. Mrs. Fiske has satisfied herself very beautifully by following this stratagem. For so many years now that it is difficult to remember, she has carefully and painstakingly picked out for herself plays of a thorough and encompassing insignificance and has then achieved for herself a specious significance by showing her audience that her talents are superior to the inferior material which engages them. This inferior material Mrs. Fiske selects with all the long planning and solicitude that some other actress spends in search of worthy material. Its inferiority, and particularly the negligibility of her own rôles, must be so unmistakable and so emphatic as to offer absolutely no resistance to

her and thus synchronously give her the opportunity to convince her audiences, by implication, that she is a much greater actress than she is and that they believe she is. It is a pitiable spectacle. Year in and year out, with minor exception, we see her reciting lines the dulness of which she has deliberately contracted for and with infinite, childish relish and warm self-congratulation triumphing over them with an ironic chuckle. Where William Gillette used to achieve a similar self-congratulatory effect by having all the other actors yell their heads off while he himself spoke in a suavely elegant *pianissimo*, Mrs. Fiske has written for her, with much diligence and precision, dialogue of the most sophomoric cut and then passes herself off as a critical intelligence by smiling condescendingly when she speaks it. But there must still be no slip-up. In order to suggest doubly to the audiences the enormous talents she has in reserve, she surrounds herself with plainly incompetent actors and craftily acts, as the saying is, under them. Far too clever a woman to act up to them, easily show them up for the lugubrious duffers they are and thus gain nothing for herself but the reputation for being comparatively a good actress in a company of very bad actors, she astutely gains for herself the reputation of being a good actress who might easily be

a great one if only her supporting company had enough skill to play up to her, give her some help and so afford her an opportunity to let herself out. She is the Mrs. Coué of our dramatic stage, past mistress of the principle of histrionic suggestion. If she is not a great actress she is at least great in suggesting that she is one. Her method is wily, admirably planned, and it works. For one person who penetrates the quackery, there are five hundred who swallow the sugar pill and beam their bravas.

#### § 4

*Barrymore*.—I take it that there is no longer much question that the proficient modern actor of Hamlet is he who acts the rôle not with his own intelligence but with the intelligence of his audience. In plainer words, that Hamlet is, figuratively speaking, no longer so much an actor's rôle as an audience's rôle, and that the best actor of that rôle is he who creates the rôle less than he mirrors the modern audience's creation of it. Forbes-Robertson is a master in this; and Leiber, though conceding vastly more to himself as actor, is similarly a captain of the stratagem. Barrymore comes to us with the same trick, and manages it admirably. His Hamlet is a calm, cool dramatic

critic in the robes of the rôle; it is an analytical and synthetic shadowgraph of its audience's reactions; it is—and this is where it properly excels—a mere scenario of its emotional implications. Yet it is not, for all its undeniably sound plan and sagacious preparation, entirely successful. I am not persuaded that Barrymore's critically exact approach to the rôle, with its obvious wealth of study, scrupulously meticulous voice cultivation and intensive training in gesture, movement and facial play, has not deadened to a degree the human warmth that might have been projected from a less strainfully perfect preliminary self-instruction and artistic castigation. Barrymore's Hamlet is critically so precise that it is at times histrionically defective. It gets across perfectly to all the professional dramatic critics in the audience, but I doubt that it gets across quite so effectively to those whom acting must more speciously and fully inflame if they are to be brought to an understanding and appreciation of the rôle with which that acting is concerned. I thus join in the praise of Barrymore, but with certain misgivings. His Hamlet, like a diamond, is glittering, vari-colored, brilliant—but cold, intensely cold. We get from it the reflected rays of intelligence, but never—or at best rarely—the rays of heat. It is, this Hamlet, a dazzling and intricate piece of machin-

ery, put together with a fine proficiency and revolving with a perfect rhythm, yet condemned by its very nature to serve as a cooling electric fan. There is in it breath—vigorous, consistent, sweeping—but it is not the breath of life. It is all that it was mathematically and validly designed to be: that is at once its tribute and its detraction.

Shaw said of Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet: "He plays as Shakespeare should be played, on the line and to the line, with the utterance and acting simultaneous, inseparable and in fact identical. Not for a moment is he solemnly conscious of Shakespeare's reputation or of Hamlet's momentousness in literary history: on the contrary, he delivers us from all these boredoms. . . ." Barrymore's utterance and acting are not always identical: one detects a self-consciousness of the importance of great occasion, of the austerity and traditions of the rôle. He goes at the rôle as a brave and gallant soldier goes into battle: with flags flying in his Sem Benelli heart and with Richard's shining sword raised courageously aloft—but with just a trace of very human timidity and fear holding him in. He is glamorous; he is percipient; he is sound in apprehension; he is eminently praiseworthy—but he is not the complete Hamlet.

## § 5

*Jane Cowl.*—It is always something of a shock to a reviewer to come upon a performance of a classical rôle which grossly violates all of his preconceived notions, laboriously harmonized out of long antecedent experience, and to find to his horror that this latest performance is apparently just as right about it all as he previously would have believed it to be wrong. It is with something of this unpleasantly agreeable sensation that Jane Cowl's Cleopatra affects me. It is intelligent in a conception that I had hitherto doubted as intelligent; it is variously and accurately registered in keys that previously I would have held to be faulty; it is shrewd in various emotional shadings which, had they been outlined to me by some august professor, would have elicited from me some very superior fermentations. It is, in brief, a Cleopatra critically sound in every particular, carefully and sagaciously studied, and wisely and adroitly projected—that never for a moment is possessed of the theatrical effect that Shakespeare strove for and that never for a moment holds one, persuades one and moves one as have Cleopatras infinitely less critically sound.

The fault with Miss Cowl's Shakespearian

Egyptian is, it seems to me, precisely the fault of John Barrymore's Shakespearian Dane. Its obvious carefully modulated and painstaking rationality takes the essential warmth out of its theatrical effectiveness. Barrymore's Hamlet is ever less a prince of Denmark than an intelligent actor reciting the rôle of a prince of Denmark. Miss Cowl's Cleopatra is ever less the serpent of the Nile than an intelligent actress playing the rôle of a snake-charmer. She is the mistress of a rôle which persists in remaining outside her person and which obeys her, as it were, at something of a distance. There is illusion in her own mind, but she does not impart it to her audience, as she did in the instance of Juliet and Mélisande. As a person she has thought out a Cleopatra that as an actress she is unable to force convincingly over the footlights. Miss Cowl has conceived the best criticism of her various sister actresses' Cleopatras that I have encountered; but her sister actresses still paradoxically remain the more vital theatrical Cleopatras. It is all much like a play by, say, Percy MacKaye and one by, say, Austin Strong. The former is indubitably the more sophisticated, intelligent and well-written, yet the latter is the more auspicious in the matter of necessary theatrical power.

## NOTES ON THE THEATRE IN GENERAL



### § 1

At its practical best, "As You Like It," theatrically the flimsiest of Shakespeare's plays, is little better than the legs of its particular Rosalind.

### § 2

There is quite as much accurate observation of human nature in such a play as "The Old Soak" as there is in such a one as "Rosmersholm."

### § 3

I find that nine-tenths of those plays which certain of my colleagues describe as "an insult to the intelligence" do not get close enough to the intelligence of anyone else to address it at all.

### § 4

In their attempt to capture various lower middle class, small town American characters, the majority of our playwrights succeed only in captur-

ing so many vaudeville actors dressed up in overalls, suspenders and calico.

### § 5

Up to eight or nine years ago, it is doubtful if, in the entire range of the American drama, there was to be found a single authentic Negro character. The Negro of drama was then either of the white wool wig and kidney pain species, given to excessive hobbling, many a “Yas, yas, massa, I’s a-comin’,” and a comic line on his every exit, or of the species that was essentially a mere blacked-up Caucasian minstrel end man in a cutaway coat three sizes too large for him and a snowy toupé who was rather dubiously transformed into a dramatic character by giving him one scene in which he taught little Frieda and Otto how to say their prayers and another in which he apologetically shuffled into his master’s library when the mortgage on the latter’s old Southern estate was about to be foreclosed by the Northern villain and, with tears in his eyes and a quiver in his voice, informed him that, come what might, he would stick to him until he was daid. The moment a Negro character appeared in the drama one knew for a certainty that the last act would either show him happily dancing a *pas seul* in the background when Miss

Sally eventually fell into the marital embrace of Lieut. Jack Terhune, U. S. A., or tremblingly awaiting his doom at the end of a clothesline held by half a dozen supers dressed up in Ku Klux regalia. It is further doubtful if up to eight or nine years ago there was on the American stage a single Negro character under fifty years of age. In the dramatic credo of the antecedent epoch it was an invariable doctrine that no Negro existed who did not have white hair and the misery in his back, and who had not been in the employ of the same family since boyhood. Those stage Ethiops were a peculiar lot, as far removed from the American Negro of actuality as the *raisonneurs* of Galsworthy are removed from the *raisonneurs* of Viennese musical comedy. Now and again a playwright would come along and try to break from the established tradition, but the best he seemed to be able to negotiate was, as in Edward Sheldon's case, a burnt-cork Sardou, or, in Thomas Dixon's, a melodramatic dummy who served as the fox in a chase by a number of white supers decked out in bed-sheets.

## § 6

Arthur Hopkins has said that any play with a good second act is pretty well on the way to being

a good play. I venture the opinion that any farce with a too good last act is pretty well on the way to being a poor farce. And for a reason that is so simple that it is in all probability wrong. If there has ever been a first-rate farce whose last act was better than its second, I am not privy to its name. When the third act of a farce is better than the preceding act, it invariably means that the author has cheated the second act by holding out of it amusing material that rightfully belonged in it so that he might bolster up the generally difficult terminal act with the material thus hoarded. The result is a sacrifice of the second act in behalf of the third. And the second result is a loss of the audience's interest at a play's most critical point, with the regaining of that interest when it is too late. Show me a farce with an excellent last act and I'll show you a farce that four times out of five is not a popular success. The great farce successes of the last fifteen years, in America and in Europe, were farces whose second acts were strong and whose last acts were comparatively weak. From "Baby Mine" and "Fair and Warmer" in America to "Die Spanische Fliege" and "Ein Reizender Mensch" in the Central Empires, and from "Madame Presidente," "Le Père La Frousse" and "Les Deux Canards" in France to

such enormously prosperous piffles as “A Little Bit of Fluff” and “Tons of Money” in England, one finds the truth of this.

### § 7

While I am not one of those who get much fun out of ridiculing the Russian drama for its wholesale murders, deaths, suicides, epilepsies, suffocations, strangulations and megrims generally, I cannot resist misgivings, as time goes on, in the matter of the storm of exclamation marks that sweeps the text of many such dramatic manuscripts. Exclamation marks are all too often the subterfuge of talent that is itself not sufficiently emphatic. In three out of every five Russian dramatic manuscripts—Tchekhoff excepted—there are more exclamation marks than in a patent medicine advertisement. Every little yes and no carries a scare-mark on its tail. A character never says, simply, “It is a pleasant morning, *batiushka*.” He invariably says, “It is a pleasant morning, *batiushka!!!*” The Russian drama is usually as indignant and stentorian about nothing as an Irishman bossing a gang of bohunks. Great drama is a drama of commas and periods. Drama that tries assiduously to be great is a drama of exclamation points.

## § 8

The current prevalent fashion among dramatists of regarding a good old-fashioned, rousing climax as something beneath dignity and artistic propriety and of sedulously avoiding all such dramatic emphasis is far from my own peculiar taste. When a dramatic climax has been foreshadowed and is rightly to be expected with high anticipation, it is thoroughly disturbing and disappointing to observe the playwright shush it aside with a great show of tony disdain and substitute for it a nonchalant reference to the weather or a drawling allusion to the villain's spats. If a playwright works me up to expect a hot scene in which the hero will face the villain, pull off the dog's whiskers, and reveal him to be none other than the knave who seduced the chambermaid and set fire to the old mill, I feel that I have a right to be disappointed when the hero, instead of doing anything of the kind, merely screws a monocle into his right eye and says, "By Jove, how well you are looking this evening, Lady Trowbridge!" The drama, as I see it, is the place for good, stirring climaxes and there is no reason to be ashamed of them, as so many of our playwrights appear to be. A good, stirring climax is somehow considered disreputable today, and in its place we have the

kind of climax that cheats the climax. Yet Who-are-you? Hawkshaw-the-detective! is better drama and will ever remain better drama than any of the current strainedly lackadaisical curtain tags.

### § 9

There is a type of playwright who gives one the impression of writing for a theatre that he condescendingly considers vulgar and to which he desires to bequeath a note of aloof refinement. But the species of refinement which this playwright contributes is usually translatable as sheer lack of strength—the transparent suavity and overly amiable manners that a man exhibits in the presence of another man bigger than himself who is threatening to whip him. This playwright is subconsciously afraid of the theatre, and seeks to beat it by being nice to it. A trace of brusque vulgarity is essential to first-rate drama, since drama is, in the Latin sense, primarily a vulgar art. Shakespeare is often as vulgar as Mr. A. E. Thomas is habitually refined. The dramatic English of the kind of playwright of whom we are speaking is smooth and elaborately precise, as trousers meticulously hung from concealed suspenders and scanned pro and con from various angles before a pier glass are smooth and precise. It lacks

ease and swing and attractive dramatic wrinkles. His humor is analytically sound humor, but it does not evoke a smile or a laugh. It lacks spontaneity; it is too conscious of itself—like a man at his first fancy dress ball.

### § 10

The dressmakers who are entrusted with the honor of confecting our actresses' gowns continue to do their highly talented best to botch the work of our playwrights. When an actress plays a scene wherein, after all her money has been lost, she gives herself up to ruminative despair and appears wearing a gown so painstakingly costly and elaborate that it looks as if Reinhardt had directed it, Morris Gest produced it and Kuhn, Loeb and Company backed it, the effect is not precisely one to move an audience to profound grief. And when the actress plays a scene wherein she is called upon to play the rôle of a pure and humble wife as against another actress impersonating a lascivious hussy and appears in a "Follies" gown that sedulously and suggestively reveals her bosom *in toto*, to say nothing of the lines of her legs as far up as the umbilicus, the effect is hardly one to arouse the sympathies of the spectators over her sad plight.

## § 11

I have never been able to make much of the phrase "commercial manager." It is as silly to condemn a theatrical manager for being commercial as it would be to condemn a writer for being readable. If a theatrical manager is not commercial, he is not a manager. Anyone can manage an enterprise into the poorhouse; it takes skill to manage it commercially and prosperously. It is not, further, a case of commercial manager so much as it is a case of commercial public. The manager is simply the business representative of his public. If it is a case of artistic public, it is a case of artistic manager. The commercial manager who would not gladly and quickly be an artistic manager if his public wanted him to be one would be such a bad business man that no one would think of complimenting him as a commercial manager even for a moment. Drama is an art; the theatre is a business. Art calls for artists; business calls for business men. Hauptmann would not know how to run a theatre one-tenth so soundly and, I venture, one-fifth so artistically for that matter, as Mr. Morris Gest. He might have much better taste, but there is a difference between creative taste and expository taste. It is one thing

to select plays; it is quite another thing to make the public select them.

For every commercial manager, there are five hundred or more commercial playwrights. If you doubt it, go into Mr. A. H. Woods' office and look at the eight-foot piles of manuscripts balanced on the baby grand piano and the spittoons. If there were no commercial playwrights there obviously would be no commercial managers. It is senseless to heap all the blame upon the managers. The theory that the estimable and artistic Arthur Hopkins is not a commercial manager but that the Selwyns, less given to artistic enterprises, are commercial managers does not hold much water. The Selwyns rejected Eugene O'Neill's "*Anna Christie*" on the ground that it wouldn't make any money. Hopkins then as promptly accepted it on the ground that it would. Hopkins was right. The fact that "*Anna Christie*" is a good play proves nothing. All that is proved is that Hopkins was a very much more sagacious commercial manager on this occasion than the Selwyns. The judgment of the latter was indeed so grudgingly bad that they do not deserve to be called commercial managers at all. An artist may be a good business man; a good business man may be an artist—or at least a man of decent artistic tastes. If this good business man does not always and invariably follow

the dictates of his better tastes he is no more to be censured than a fine poet is to be censured for doing odd jobs on the side in order to make enough money to live comfortably. To criticize a commercial manager for not wishing to lose all his money in behalf of a public without taste is to posture one's self as a hypocrite and a blockhead.

### § 12

The efforts of the average American mummer in the direction of romantic acting are approximately as persuasive as a waltz tune at breakfast. I have always felt, if perhaps not always believed, that no man has ever been a successful romantic actor save he was in himself something of a romantic figure. This may, for all I know, be perfect nonsense and I shall be glad to retract it upon receipt of contradictory evidence. Yet my experience of the theatre has impressed upon me the peculiar and outlandish conviction that an actor cannot, whatever his proficiency and whatever his talents, act a Faversham or a George Alexander or an Edgar Beaman rôle unless he be a Faversham or an Alexander or a Beaman. Nonsense or not nonsense, it is, as I see it, quite the same as expecting a George Arliss, with all his ability and skill, to be a Rudolph Valentino, for all the latter's lack of that

same ability and skill. The last thing that a romantic actor needs is a high talent; the first thing that a romantic actor needs is a highly romantic personality.

### § 13

It is not that the morals of the persons connected with the moving pictures are necessarily lower than those of the persons associated with music, painting or the theatre; it is that, by the nature of the persons connected with the moving pictures, the morals, whatever their feebleness, are inevitably and disgustingly vulgar. The rank and file of the movies comes, in the main, from the gutters—and it is impossible for the gutter to suffer a lapse in morals and be synchronously charming about it. To the immorality of the moving picture world there is, consequently, an air of foul tawdryness, of the cheap-smelling dive, of pig-stye amour. There is in it, from beginning to end, not a trace of the sweeping manner of that of grand opera, not a trace of the gay adventure and spectacularity of that of the stage, not a trace of the wistful charm of that of the atelier. So long as the majority of figures in the field of the movies are recruited from the social and æsthetic slums, so long will the smell of Limehouse cling to the movie's scandals. Only

ladies and gentlemen can get away with the thing that is killing the movies in the minds of respectable men, women and children.

### § 14

I have just seen the three hundred and fourteenth play that lowers the lights for one minute and, upon raising them again, asks me to believe that in this one minute one year has passed, that a baby has been born to the couple upon whose reconciliation the lights went down but sixty seconds before, that a husband who has been passionately in love with another woman has changed his mind during the brief period of darkness, gone back to his wife and become the bosom pal of the husband of the other woman, and that everyone has returned from Europe with a completely new and very elaborate wardrobe. All that I can say, and with becoming modesty, is this: that I doubtless have as good an imagination as the next man, but that I'll be hanged if I can do it!

### § 15

There is ever one detail in which a mature actress is unable to counterfeit young girlhood, a detail that is invariably a stumbling-block when

the actress has seen youth vanish. She is unable to duplicate the running walk of the 'teens. There never lived an actress over thirty who could successfully manage a young girl's running walk, or who could walk upstairs without promptly betraying her age.

### § 16

There are thirty-two professional directors at present actively engaged in producing the American drama. With just four exceptions, these directors persuade their actors to snap their fingers by way of indicating everything from doubt to decision, to fold their arms by way of indicating everything from defiance to resignation, and to paddle up and down and across the stage by way of indicating everything from perplexity to happiness.

### § 17

The common dodge of the stage which asks an audience to work up its sympathies for a baby that all too obviously is actually nothing but a long bag of oatmeal tied with pink ribbons works to many a play's undoing. When, in that scene of a play wherein the audience is asked to get tearful over a lonely baby's plight, the audience can

plainly see that the lonely little baby being hugged to the bosom of the desolate father was certainly never brought by the stork but was very much more likely dragged in by the cat, and when, further, its plaintive little cry emanates less from the bundle that represents the baby than from a stagehand hidden behind the piano twenty-five feet away—when this happens, the playwright finds that he has cut out a tough job for himself. I surely am not ass enough to urge that realism be carried so far in the theatre that real one-year-old babies be begot, or perhaps merely hired, as the dramatic occasion may require, but I feel, as the skilful producers of "Baby Mine" and many another play that has depended largely for its effect upon the verisimilitude of the infant protagonists have well appreciated, that at least a satisfactory compromise with realism should be arrived at. It may be that the babies in "Baby Mine," though fashioned with an extreme ingenuity out of wax, did not look exactly like real live babies, but it is certain that, at their worst, they looked a whole lot more like babies than like so many sofa pillows in diapers.

### § 18

The American actor, when he attempts to cavort in French farce, is a sad spectacle. Where the

French actor is able to play naughty farce with the same air of blithe unconsciousness and moral unconcern that he displays in a Biblical drama, his American colleague can never quite rid his playing in such farce of an air of moral consciousness and ethical superiority. He seems to say, this American actor: "Although I am supposed to have seduced the midinette Gaby and to be making a pass at Fifi, my best friend's wife, to say nothing of carrying on secret liaisons with Heloise, the pretty parlor maid, and Margot, the laundress, you surely know that I am personally a pure gentleman who loves his wife and child and am, further, a member of the Asbury Park M. E. Church and up in my dues to the Players Club." This American actor—and the American actress even more so—conveys the impression that there is something *infra dig* in playing risqué farce and that if he had his way and didn't need the money, he would much prefer to go out with the Ben Greet company or have a part in the Actors' Equity Theatre performances. What follows, when a French farce is brought over here and cast with American actors, is a divertissement that, whatever its manuscript deviltries, is approximately as impish as "Robinson Crusoe." . . . The truth of the matter is perhaps this: that where the Frenchman is able whole-heartedly to act dirty farce in the spirit

of clean entertainment the American can not do other than to act such farce in a spirit of half-hearted moral qualm which makes it dirtier than it otherwise would be.

### § 19

You may tell the average American theatregoer almost anything, and he will listen to it. You may show him almost anything, and he will believe it. But you cannot ask him to feel certain things and persuade him to feel them. The goods in the American theatrical emotion market are stable products, each clearly labeled, capped and trade-marked. The shelves are precise, orderly; the cans are arranged in nice, even rows; each is at once recognizable. There is no room for jars that are a trifle strange, a trifle unconformable, a trifle puzzling. Love is thus an emotion that leads (1) to sin, (2) to marriage, or (3) to a misogynistic ranch in Australia or Montana; hate an emotion that leads (1) to losing one's best girl, or (2) to murder; joy an emotion that leads (1) to singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," (2) to slapping one's dignified aunt on the décolleté, or (3) to launching into a droll *pas seul*, suddenly terminated by the unexpected entrance of one's stern employer; and indignation an emotion

that leads (1) to slamming a door, (2) to a jamming on of the telephone receiver, or (3) (if a woman under thirty) to turning abruptly on one's heel and saucily flirting one's bustle at the offender, or (if a woman over thirty) to directing one's index finger up stage and uttering the word "Go" in a deep beer-bass.

Obviously, what I here set down is in the vein of somewhat forced and heavy humor, but it may connote none the less the immediately transparent emotional standardization of the American popular theatre. It is this theatre that has brought failure to a considerable assortment of meritorious plays whose emotional sub-structures have been, by virtue of their comparative newness, cardiacly unintelligible to the public that constitutes that theatre—to name a few, Molnar's "Where Ignorance Is Bliss," Miss Akins' "Papa," Schönherr's "Children's Tragedy," Knoblock's "Faun," Guitry's "Sleeping Partners," Brieux's "Incubus," Tchekhoff's "Seagull," Bahr's "Master," Richman's "Ambush," De Curel's "New Idol," Porto-Riche's "Amoureuse," Molnar's "Phantom Rival," Földes' "Over the 'Phone," Langner's "Family Exit." . . . The emotional propulsion of such themes as Strindberg's "Miss Julie" and "The Father," Wedekind's "Pandora's Box" and "Hiddalla," Schnitzler's "Anatol," Capus' "The Two

Schools," de Caillavet's and de Flers' "The King" and "The Beautiful Adventure," Zoë Akins' "The Texas Nightingale" and even H. S. Sheldon's "The Havoc," must inevitably confound the American box-office. To succeed, no play may venture an emotional philosophy that is not absolutely elementary.

### § 20

Nothing is so easy as to write flippantly of the Italian marionettes and nothing so difficult as to write of them soberly and seriously. They, as all marionettes, fall into that middle ground which, approached critically, is to be viewed soundly only with an amalgam of sobriety and light irony. It is because the directing talents of the Teatro dei Piccoli, of Rome, fully appreciate the truth of this point of view and act upon it in their handling of the marionettes that their little theatre has become one of the two deservedly leading marionette houses in the world. I observe, however, that this very virtue of the Piccoli functionaries is confusedly regarded by American critics as a deficiency. Although the Piccoli has always been conscious of the absurdity of presenting the marionettes in any but an approximately absurd manner, although it has ever astutely presented them as puppets with strings

always, and hands occasionally, showing—although, further, it has sagaciously emphasized the toy quality above everything—the local wise men criticize as faults these very things that are, and ever have been recognized to be, the Piccoli's greatest merits.

Marionettes, however, whether good or bad, I generally find pretty tiresome after half an hour. They appeal to the child in one and, as in the case of all toys, the child in one tires quickly. Furthermore, marionette performances nine times in ten are made tedious because of the quality of material that is customarily visited upon them. With the same kind of material, living actors would be equally wearisome. The greatest all-star cast in America, called upon to play the usual marionette material, would empty a theatre by nine o'clock.

### § 21

The mystery story is a form of diversion that appeals to highly intelligent men and to morons. It jumps the wide gulf with the pole of rational paradox. It is the middle mind alone that does not care for the mystery tale and that sneers at it contemptuously. The greatest scientist living has declared that the mystery story provides his favorite form of light amusement, and a certain

manufacturer of a commodity that took William Jennings Bryan's place as the chief source of American jokes has made the same declaration. Between the right wing of intelligence and the left wing of ignorance we find the layer of humanity that is neither sufficiently educated nor sufficiently uneducated properly to relish the mystery story. In this layer we observe the class that affects keenly to enjoy dialectics in the theatre, that goes into giddy raptures over the tremendous genius of some moving picture producer, that professes to be warmed by the tonal monkeyshines of Schönberg, and that stands in open-mouthed awe every other Tuesday when an art gallery displays the latest importation of modern art from Tzpzyzpk, Hungary, or Kvalzvalokovitch, Russia. The mystery story succeeds in the theatre, when it is dramatized with any degree of skill, because the theatre culls its patrons chiefly from the intelligentsia and the half-wits, the latter, of course, being in the overwhelming majority.

## § 22

The Charlot revues in London, like the so-called "Nine o'Clock" revues, have been built upon the principle that, in the music show, unlike in drama, the idea is more important than the treatment.

Give the audience the idea and then ring down the curtain. Such the theory, and, so far as music shows go, an excellent one. The theory of the average American revue producer, to the contrary, is that any comparatively fresh idea is worth at least a twenty-five minute sketch, the first three minutes of which are taken up with the idea and the last twenty-two of which are spent stalling until the stagehands have set up the fifteen thousand dollar set showing Hot Springs by moonlight and the girls have changed their South Sea Island costumes for costumes somewhat more relevantly Norwegian. The English revue is thus often as diverting in its contemptuous nonchalance as certain American revues are now and again tedious in their laborious overemphasis.

### § 23

The major portion of the modern French serious drama suffers from an excess of theatricality. It touches life, but as one touches wet paint: with staccato uncertainties and quick withdrawals. Some of the paint of actuality clings to the dramatist's fingers, but for the most part those fingers remain the immaculate ones of the deliberate thetrician, their nails glistening resplendently with the obvious polish of grease paint. This

drama, further, drags unconscionably. Every emotion, every argument, every situation, is as prolonged as the bottom of a Frenchman's trousers.

### § 24

Many a popular playwright starts out with an available and fetching boob idea and then makes the mistake of trying professorially to reduce the boobishness of it, thus making it more boobish than it would otherwise have been, and so ruining it. It takes a more or less skilled fellow to write a purely boob play so deceptively that the graduated boob is persuaded, through a voluntary remission of judgment, to enjoy it with all of his original unsophistication.

We all of us begin in the cradle as boobs; all men are born free from intelligence and equal in vacuity. Some of us, as we go on in life, quit the great democracy of boobery, and some of us do not. But, in the best as in the worst of us, there is ever the lingering residuum of our original and generic imbecility. And it is the expert popular playwright who understands this and, understanding it, fashions his plays accordingly. That is, he writes not for the boob who has carried his cradle boobishness whole and intact through the years to manhood, but for the man who, for all the wisdom

that time and experience have brought to him, yet carries within him the indelible traces of boobery that are part and parcel of every human being. "The Old Soak," "The Bat," "Lightnin'," "The Fortune Hunter," "Seven Keys to Baldpate" and "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford" are examples of the latter craft: what may be called sophisticated boob plays. There are innumerable dramatic examples of the former craft: what may be called the boob-boob play, the kind of attempted popular play, that is, which is designed to appeal not to comparatively intelligent persons in their idiotic moments, but to idiotic persons in their comparatively intelligent moments. The result—from the critical point of view and from the financial no less—is that such a play falls between two stools. It catches neither the alumnus boob nor the undergraduate boob. It is too clumsy in its effort to gull the former, and too patent in its effort to grab the latter.

### § 25

It is the practice of a certain school of playwrights shrewdly to palm off their unabashedly popular plays on a somewhat (but very slightly) higher level of theatrical sophistication and worldliness by an appealing statement of immoral values in terms of moral approbation. I use the ad-

jectives, of course, in their proletarian sense and with their proletarian implications. This dodge contrives to dazzle a certain portion of the audience into believing that what it would otherwise doubtless promptly recognize as very ordinary stuff is very ordinary stuff only at bottom which has been transmuted into something noteworthy and been made dramatically august and important. Meritorious drama, however, is unfortunately not to be fashioned so easily. The ordinary play of commerce can hardly be lifted to the heights by the trick, however adroitly managed, of making the essentially unpopular convincingly popular.

### § 26

It does not take grisled old theatregoers like our younger dramatic critics to recall the day—now some thirteen or fourteen years back—when the town was set to a fidgety and horrified whispering by William Hurlbut's employment of the word “rape” in his play “New York,” then current at the old Bijou, and to an even more violent and horrified indignation by Clyde Fitch's unheard of use of the oath “God damn you” in his play “The City,” on view at the Lyric. Today such words and oaths are not only commonplaces in our popular theatre and pass unnoticed, but words and oaths

thrice as salty make no more impression on an audience than common sense makes on a French deputy. "God damn you," appearing casually even in a little comedy like Buchanan's "The Sporting Thing To Do," pricks the audience's ear no whit more than the venerable "Go to hell" of a hundred and one pifflemills. "Bastard," reclaimed from Shakespeare and the Restoration dramatists, is as common on the present-day popular stage as bad acting. "Jesus Christ!" is sworn indiscriminately. "The Hairy Ape's" language, that bothers only a few meddlesome clergymen in Philadelphia and the other rural districts—a language that ten years ago would have made Dr. Brander Matthews blush to the roots of his whiskers—today hardly fetches a lift of the eyelid. And "Rain," with an artillery of words that would bar even a church trade paper from the United States mails were it to be set down therein, crowds the theatre to the doors and apparently doesn't shock any of the innumerable lay moralists in the audience save a stray member of the Drama League and a few old maids, and them pleasantly.

For all the talk of the current blue-nosed censorship and busybody reform, so vociferously denounced by our Franco-Chicagoans and their fellow Continentals of St. Louis, Akron, Pottstown and points East, one cannot but appreciate from

the statistics that never before in the history of the American theatre, and in literature no less, has a greater laxity in expression been permitted, a greater freedom in theme vouchsafed. Certainly the records fail to support those who argue the contrary, and who cry against the confining and corrupting influence of the alleged outside regulation of the arts. What I say here is surely not to be mistaken for a defense of such regulation. I now, as ever in the past, visit a preëminently sour eye upon regulation and censorship save where they concern themselves with cheap and obvious commercial smut. But what I do defend is the current censorship and regulation from the sweeping charges that have wrongly and not a little idiotically been made against them. They have minded their business much better than their howlers-down appear to believe. Now and again, of course, some absurd old fogy arises to condemn a respectable piece of literature on the ground that his flapper daughter got dirty ideas while reading it; and now and again some kept vice agent seeks to earn his keep and some unsatisfied wife or disappointed society woman snoots out a second-hand sex or publicity thrill by sitting on a committee to pass upon allegedly lewd plays—but in general things have been allowed a commendably free rein.

If those who are loudest in disclaiming this will glance back, they will quickly see for themselves how unfounded is any other attitude. Take, specifically, the theatre. Is there alive in the United States today a single clergyman, a single vice rat, a single censor, however bigoted, who would even think of inveighing against the theme of such a play as "The Conquerors," as their brothers in moral arms inveighed twenty-five years ago? Or against such a scene as the at-the-time condemned one in "The Turtle" wherein a woman was supposed to be disrobing behind a screen? Or against such an episode as the girl removing her stockings in "Naughty Anthony," which twenty years ago was held highly indecent? Or against Olga Nethersole's celebrated long kiss and the staircase episode of "Sapho"? Or against the well-remembered Archie Gunn poster of Anna Held, that was put down as obscene because it actually displayed the lady's bare hip? Yet all this was not so very long ago. Today such things attract not the slightest attention from the professional moralists or anyone else. Nor do things a thousandfold more ticklish. For one complaint against a line or two in "The Demi-Virgin," an out and out commercialization of bawdry, a score and more "Please Get Marrieds" with scenes that go as far as anything on the French boulevards are per-

mitted to travel their comfortable way unmolested. And for one moral kick against a line and an episode in "The Rubicon," a score and more of "Ladies' Nights" and "Getting Gertie's Garters" with their smoking-car humors are allowed to go their virgin course. And meanwhile the British censors scissor to pieces any play that satirizes religion even in a way that to an American censor would seem extremely mild and inoffensive. And meanwhile the Austrian theatrical censors howl against Schnitzler's "Professor Bernhardi" which no American censor has so much as whispered against in its local appearance in book form. And meanwhile the Russian censors keep an ever-alert eye to the political nature of plays, ready to pounce and strike in case a theme is not to their tastes and interests. And meanwhile the French, forgetting for the nonce their indignation over "La Garçonne," compel the management of the Grand Guignol to delete from the bill of the evening a gruesome melodramatic one act play that the American censors would not conceivably trouble themselves over for a moment . . . London balks at the tabooed word "bloody" in Shaw's "Pygmalion," and protests until it is red in the face. A word comparatively three times as shocking is shouted no less than four times in the American presentation of a dramatization of Sudermann's

“Song of Songs” and doesn’t so much as cause a flutter. “The Egotist” makes utterly no impression in New York with dialogue saucier than that which in Guitry’s “Black and White” causes Paris to gasp aloud. “Patricide” flabbergasts Berlin where, I venture confidently to predict, it would only inspire New York to blasé yawns. . . .

### § 27

The average American playwright is beset by a priggishness whose generally discernible exterior protoplasm takes the form of smugly centering all the vices (frequently dubious) in the person of a villain who amounts to a caricature and then bringing all the other male characters periodically to threaten to punch him in the jaw.

### § 28

When a Frenchman turns coy and tries to write a chaste comedy, what follows is often as unfortunate as when an American paints his blue nose red and tries to write a risqué comedy. The Frenchman’s comedy in such circumstance is generally so strainfully virtuous that it is deadly, as the American’s is so laboriously smutty that it is

deadly no less. Entertaining clean sentimental comedy seems to be as far from the talents of the generality of French playwrights as entertaining risqué comedy is from the talents of the generality of American. For that matter, the American Harry Wagstaff Gribble in "March Hares," meeting the Frenchmen on their own ground, has written a better risqué comedy than any Parisian has turned out in the last half dozen years, while not a single Frenchman, meeting the American playwright on *his* own ground, has succeeded in composing an immaculate comedy of any sound merit whatsoever.

### § 29

It seems to me that the Shuberts have made a big mistake in abolishing smoking at the Winter Garden. I don't know how the rest of the public feels about it, but so far as I am concerned—and the Shuberts should take due and serious notice of what I say, because I get in for nothing—I don't like it. I do not mean to say, of course, that the Shuberts should sacrifice the taste and comfort of the rest of the public for my especial benefit, but I throw out a hint. If there is one way that they can earn my good will and bring me to let down

easily the next performance that Bertha Kalich gives, it is by letting me smoke in the above-mentioned emporium.

Whether the former Winter Garden shows were really as good as I used to say they were, I shall never know. There is something about a *Flor de Pittsburgh* that always makes me believe a show is much better than it is. Give me a nice, long *Manuel Garcia y Copley-Plaza de Balboa Infanta*, light it for me, and I am willing to agree that not only is *Marie Dressler* the most beautiful woman I have ever seen but that the number in which the chorus girls come out representing flowers and form a bouquet by putting their heads together in the centre of the stage at the finale is a great novelty. Such is the frame of mind, the spiritual faith, that tobacco imparts to me. It was with a cigar in my mouth that I voted for *Woodrow Wilson*.

There are, to be sure, some theatrical exhibitions at which one does not care to smoke. For example, such things as a drama by *Charles Rann Kennedy* or a play by the *Hattons*. They spoil the taste of the cigar. But if ever there was a place to smoke, that place is a music hall. A music hall without smoking is like a dinner without drinking. Half of the pleasure disappears. Thus, while for all I know the present Winter Garden

shows may be good ones, they do not seem so good to me as the old ones used to. This may not be dramatic criticism, but what has dramatic criticism to do with a girl and tune show? The all-important thing to me about a girl and tune show is not whether my colleague, Mr. J. Ranken Towse, considers it up to the tremendous æsthetic heights reached in 1736 by the Sussex Operatic Troupe when the latter played the Liverpool Coliseum, but whether it tickles my own idiotic fancy on this or that particular night in 1924. And such a show fails to tickle that fancy when I am made by the management to feel unduly dignified and formal. A man who feels thus unduly dignified and formal is not the likeliest receptacle for jokes about monkey glands, songs about the wimmin, and numbers in which a soubrette dressed up as a top-hatted dandy dances down the line of girls and chuck~~s~~ each in turn under the chin. In order appropriately to appreciate jokes about monkey glands, songs about the wimmin, and numbers in which a soubrette dressed up as a top-hatted dandy dances down the line of girls and chuck~~s~~ each in turn under the chin it is necessary for me to get myself into the proper mood. Smoking is the other way for me to do it. Embellish my façade with a luscious Sevilla Inglaterra Malecon y Vedado Carmelo de Morro Castle Perfectionado Ele-

ganto Superbissimo Extremo Grandioso, and I am ready to laugh and cheer and clap my hands with all the enthusiasm that my brother reviewers display over Rudolph Schildkraut's whiskers. But take the cigar away from me and I am indeed a sour one. There I sit with professorial frown, looking like a misplaced owl, the while the folks to the left and right of me appear to be having the time of their lives. I am a wet blanket, a kill-joy, a stomach-ache.

Therefore, that the pleasure of the theatregoers who are forced to sit near me in the Winter Garden may not be spoiled by my lugubrious and dyslogistic mien, I urge the Shuberts, in the interest of their paying patrons, to let me smoke as they used to. After sending me two boxes of excellent Havanas as a Christmas gift, they surely should not be pleased to have me take advantage of their commendable generosity and good will and waste the fragrant acumen-confounding tobacco smoke in the smoke-rooms and lavatories of the theatres of their rivals. Being something of a gentleman, with a gentleman's constant regard for punctilio and good form, I should feel it a scurvy and thankless trick to betray the Messrs. Shubert by smoking one of their eminently toothsome cigars at, say, a Dillingham show, and thus be brought to give the show a better notice than it might other-

wise deserve. It is, accordingly, the duty of the Messrs. Shubert, as I see it, to help me out of the embarrassing predicament in which they have placed me. I want to smoke their cigars where it will do them the most good. I want to be reciprocal. Therefore, if they will let me smoke them in their Winter Garden, we shall both profit. I'll give them such a notice about jokes on monkey glands, songs about the wimmin, and numbers in which a soubrette dressed up as a top-hatted dandy dances down the line of girls and chucks each in turn under the chin as will make my colleagues' hallelujahs to the Algonquin Duses and Salvini's seem like so many death chants.

Meanwhile, however, I am by their will and decree forced into a dubious silence. Arriving on the scene with pockets full of perfectos, panatelas, fancy tales, belvideres, puritanos and what not, and apprised at the gate as I enter that no smoking will be allowed, I find myself so occupied for the rest of the evening with worrying over whether the cigars will break before the show is over that I can pay little attention to what is going on on the stage. Just as what seems to be a very good tune begins to reach my ears, I feel a crackle in my pocket and before the consequent necessary investigation is completed find that the song is finished without my having heard it. And so with the jests and the

girls and the big costume numbers. I miss two-thirds of them. Applause rings out on all sides, but only further to confound and bewilder me, for my mind is not upon the business in hand. It is ever far afield, meditating upon the happy Winter Garden nights of the years before, ere the Shuberts had joined the Anti-Tobacco League and when still silver clouds born of sweet-smelling leaves from down San Cristobal way floated lazily up to the ceiling and made jokes about monkey glands, songs about the wimmin, and numbers in which a soubrette dressed up as a top-hatted dandy dances down the line of girls and chuck each in turn under the chin such stuff as the joy of dreams is made on. . . .

### § 30

With a few notable exceptions, the modern Spanish drama, with its passionate personages dressed up like an old beer-garden "Bohemian Girl" opera troupe, is, to the Anglo-Saxon, as recalcitrantly humorous as a Sardou drama played by a company of child actors.

### § 31

I wish to register an objection to the names

which the majority of Russian dramatists bestow upon their characters. I am perhaps one of many who feels that there must be hundreds of thousands of men and women in Russia who are named something less difficult to negotiate than Zhionovsky Finagei Zhivoiedikha Tzpztrodnzkoff, for instance, or Vassilisa Phchshohz Atchzohsh Prazczkhozvna. Surely there are simpler names that might fit the characters just as well. I am convinced that a Russian dramatist who names his characters after this fashion, giving to the program the aspect of a Stephen Leacock in whiskers, is as much at fault as an American playwright who might perhaps legitimately, but quite unnecessarily, name his characters Stuyvesant Montmorency Van Terwiliiger, Chautauqua Peabody-Peabody or Laomenes Gamaliel Lichtenstein.

### § 32

There is no legitimate actor who can resist the powerful lure of the movies. It isn't the money that fetches him. It isn't the softness of the job. It isn't the great publicity. It isn't the soothing, warm climate of California. It is simply this: *the movies enable an actor to look at himself.* God never made a cabotin who could resist so beguiling and overpowering a temptation.

## § 33

Bernard Shaw writes the dramatic criticisms for most of the New York newspapers whenever a Shakespearian production comes along. Though his articles are signed with different names, no one is fooled. The afternoon before such a production all the boys dig out their copies of "Dramatic Opinions and Essays," bone up on what he said about it, and the next morning faithfully repeat his views. This has been going on now for about twenty years. Every time a reviewer dies or loses his job and another reviewer gets his place, Arthur Brentano automatically instructs the clerk in his drama book department to wrap up the two Shaw volumes in order to save time when the new reviewer appears on the run an hour later.

## § 34

The average American actor, cast for a rôle in a French play, seeks to convey to the audience that he is a French character by the simple expedient of wearing a very tight cutaway coat and bringing his top hat into the room with him instead of leaving it out in the hall.

## § 35

The ubiquitous practice of hiring an all-star cast to act the kind of play that is usually selected for such occasions is much like chartering the *Aquitania* to carry a picture post-card to Southampton.

## § 36

When the average mature actress essays the rôle of a young girl she makes it and herself ridiculous by mimicking less authentic youth than a Broadway ingénue's idea of youth. Youth to such an actress is a matter of kneeling on chairs, sitting with one foot curled under her bottom, tossing her bobbed hair from side to side, kicking her right foot backward when the hero hugs her, wearing flat heels, and talking baby talk.

## § 37

I have observed that when our novelists sell themselves to the movies they proclaim and endorse the artistic status and future of the movies after something like the following schedule:

1. If they have received \$5,000 from the movies for their novel, they content themselves with

declaring that "the moving pictures are still in their infancy."

2. If they have received \$7,500, they elaborate a bit and declare that "since the moving pictures are still in their infancy, it is as yet unfair to judge them finally from an artistic point of view."
3. If they receive \$10,000, they elaborate still more, to wit, that "since the moving pictures are still in their infancy and while it is as yet unfair to judge them finally from an artistic point of view, some fine things have already been done in the movies and these fine things are a happy augury of what the movies may accomplish in the future."
4. If they have received \$12,500 they substitute "many fine things" for "some fine things," change "may accomplish" to "will surely accomplish," and make it read "in the very near future" instead of simply "in the future."
5. If they get \$15,000, they declare flatly that the movies are an art.
6. If they get \$17,500, they elaborate this to read that the movies are as great an art as the drama.
7. If they get \$20,000, they go still farther and say that the movies "because of their enor-

mous flexibility and fluidity and their consequent ability to do countless things that the stage cannot, are destined to be an even greater art than the drama."

8. If they receive \$25,000, they rush into the public prints to declare that the screen is due some day to supersede the pen and that the novels of the future are destined to be projected directly by the films.
9. If they get \$30,000, they change the "some day" to "very soon."
10. If they receive \$35,000, they embellish the foregoing with statements to the effect that Shakespeare's plays are really moving picture plays unconsciously written in the moving picture form and that if Shakespeare were alive today he surely would write for the screen instead of for the stage.
11. If they get \$40,000, they compare the moving pictures not only with Shakespeare, but with the work of Praxiteles, Michelangelo, da Vinci, Rubens, Bach, Flaubert and Goethe, to the considerable disadvantage, specifically, of the two last named.
12. If they get \$50,000, they stipulate with unmistakable emphasis that the movies are the great art of all time and that anyone who says that they aren't is simply a disappointed

writer who has tried to sell his wares to the movies and has not succeeded.

### § 38

One of the things in this world over which I can't get wildly excited is a play that has been turned into a musical comedy. The theory that a bad play may be converted into a good musical comedy by the simple device of cutting an hour out of the original manuscript and in place of that hour substituting another composed of songs about Alabama, jokes on Indian guides, and several chorus numbers in which a liberal display of young ladies' esoteric epidermis is made to take the place of dancing—this theory is as puzzling as that other which holds that a good play may be turned into an even better musical comedy by taking out nine-tenths of what made it good and putting in \$20,000 worth of Paquin gowns illuminated with \$10,000 worth of phosphorescent paint and a five-cent joke illuminated with one cent's worth of humor. When I go to a musical comedy I want a musical comedy, not an emasculated play. A musical comedy, as I see it, is—or at least should be—a half-crazy patchwork of good tunes, good jokes, good dances and bad girls, with a certain amount of rhyme if no reason, and just nonsensical

enough to give the mind and feet a bit of a picnic. That is, any musical comedy that hasn't been written by Gilbert and Sullivan. When sense is put into a musical comedy, the musical comedy is ruined. And sense is put into it in some degree when the musical comedy is fashioned from a play. What results on such occasions is neither a play nor a musical comedy but a spurious Siamese twin, the one half definitely musical and the other half definitely dramatic—and both halves no more legitimately connected than a couple in a Raines law hotel.

### § 39

The Grand Guignol under Choisy is not what it was under Maurey. Nor, for that matter, has it ever been quite what certain folk, knowing it only from afar, have persuaded themselves to believe. In all its long history it has never, so far as I know—and I have followed its career with what has been perhaps an unnecessarily close attention—produced a single specimen of absolutely first-rate dramatic writing, although, to be sure, it has produced any number of original and amusing risqué comedies and farces, some sharp, breathless thrillers, and one likable little satiric fantasy, the “*Fi-celles*” of Giacosa. Its scenic equipment has al-

ways been ordinary. Maurey's particular forte lay in the achievement on the tiny stage in the Rue Chaptal of a very remarkable atmosphere: in this, the Guignol was exceptional. With the crudest sort of scenery and lighting and with a platform of an almost absurd shallowness, he managed to get a curiously compelling reality into his presentations that has not been surpassed in the theatre of our time. But Choisy, alas, is no Maurey.

The Guignol has ever been a freak theatre. The little building up the dark alley, with its tin piano and two-by-four bar and hard pews, with its studies in Krafft-Ebing melodrama and its excruciatingly comic naughty bedroom didoes, has long been the mecca of serious criticism off on the loose. One has gone to the Guignol in Paris as one has gone to Madame Tussaud's in London, or to the female prize-fights in Berlin, or to the opera house in San José, Costa Rica. One has pretty generally had a good time, but one has left one's critical sense at the hotel.

#### § 40

The weakness of much of the current so-called realism in drama lies in the authors' belief that mere reporting constitutes sharp pictorial dra-

matic writing. If this were true, the moving picture camera would be the greatest artistic instrument in the world. The average realistic playwright can report facts, but he is unable to report the reaction of an imagination to those facts. The result is a play that presents recognizable characters in recognizable situations with neither the characters nor the situations being recognizably dramatic.

### § 41

Although it would doubtless take fifty head of clairvoyants full of opium and working day and night over the glass balls for a month running to root out the true secret of the amazing success of the play called "Abie's Irish Rose"—a success that has caused innumerable music show comedians to allude to that opus as the fourth biggest industry in the United States—a few speculations may be permitted one who has set his pet bloodhound to sniffing the trail for a year or more. To those persons who are closely acquainted with American burlesque shows, the huge success of the Nichols play is not so confounding as it is to others. In burlesque, there is a sketch or act or what-not called "Krausmeyer's Alley." This "Krausmeyer's Alley" has enjoyed the longest consecu-

tive run of any theatrical exhibit in American history. It has been playing in the burlesque houses, without interruption, for more than two generations, and, of everything in burlesque, it is the one thing that never fails to amuse its audiences. These audiences see it regularly, and have been seeing it regularly for many, many years, and in all that time nothing has been hit upon to take its place in their affections. The act is well-known to most American men of the present time from their boyhood days. Probably one American male out of every three is familiar with it and has paid it, at one time or another, the tribute of his hearty laughter.

“Krausmeyer’s Alley,” as these will recall, deals with the hostility that exists between the German family Krausmeyer on the one hand and the Irish family Grogan on the other, of their prejudices and the contumely which they heap each upon the other, and of their final more or less affectionate coming together. This theme is, of course, in view of the nature of burlesque audiences, handled very crudely; it is developed with a slapstick, numerous references to Limburger cheese and showers of dead tomcats; it is related in terms as elemental as A, B, C. And, as I have noted, it regularly tickles more persons annually than any other one thing in the native theatre.

What Anne Nichols has done in "Abie's Irish Rose" is simply to elaborate the "Krausmeyer's Alley" sketch into a three act play and to doll it up a bit—a very small bit—for the two and a half dollar trade. She has kept Grogan as he is in the burlesque perennial and given Krausmeyer the name of Levy. The basic fabric remains exactly the same. What has resulted is the unparalleled success of "Krausmeyer's Alley" lifted over from the burlesque houses to the legitimate theatre.

By turning the German character into a Jew, Miss Nichols has plainly widened the box-office appeal of her play—although one ventures the guess that had the late war not occurred she would have kept Krausmeyer just as he was in the burlesque piece and scored not much less of a success. For the burlesque house audiences, filtered through the moving pictures, have overflowed into the legitimate theatre, at least on such occasions as that theatre contains something that is within the range of their taste and intelligence. "Krausmeyer's Alley," alias "Abie's Irish Rose," is within that range, and under its new title it has captured them just as fully as the stem-play has these forty years and more.

"Abie's Irish Rose" is, according to the standards of the legitimate theatre, every bit as elemental as is "Krausmeyer's Alley" in the measure

of the burlesque theatre. And while Miss Nichols, true enough, is not the first playwright who has tried to carry over the golden success of "Krausmeyer's Alley" from burlesque to the legitimate stage, she is the first who has had financial sagacity enough to carry over the comic flavor of the theme. In the last twenty years we have had no less than a dozen attempts to make a drama out of the "Krausmeyer" theme, and none of these attempts has made any money. Making the theme dramatic, treating it seriously, has taken the box-office juice out of it, for there is no difference between the kind of person who likes "Krausmeyer's Alley" at one dollar and the kind who likes it at two and a half dollars. Miss Nichols has kept it in its virginal form, simply deadening the sound of the slapstick to a degree. But though she calls her "Abie's Irish Rose" a comedy, it is a burlesque show for all that. Every single one of its effects—take, for example, the dubbing of Murphy (as she calls Grogan) Murphiski, by way of making Levy think that the Irishman is a co-religionist—is achieved by obvious burlesque show means. If the authors of "As A Man Thinks," "The House Next Door" and all the other dramas of a kidney had related their theme in the low comic manner of Miss Nichols, instead of growing solemn over it, they would undoubtedly have achieved at least

a portion of her success. For the theatrical taste of a people changes only on the higher levels. The lower levels remain always set. "Krausmeyer's Alley" will please hundreds of thousands of theatregoers forty years from now as it pleased them forty years ago.

### § 42

In the records of the American theatre, the drama of George M. Cohan will figure chiefly as a series of spectacles wherein a young man with a straw hat brashly tilted over one eye converted a dilapidated village store into a resplendent bazaar and married Mary, the ingénue in the ten dollar dress, as the stagehands pulled an illuminated papier-mâché trolley car across the backdrop. To these spectacles the box-office will be remembered as having responded with an inevitable enthusiasm because of Mr. Cohan's ingenious trick of applying the invariably successful Cinderella theme to the scenery. Popular playwrights for many years had been reaping their reward from revampings of the Cinderella story in terms of character when Cohan came along with the novel and doubly profitable notion of transferring the Cinderella idea from the characters to the painted canvas. The public, become a bit sur-

feited with the kind of play wherein the poor, abused, little orphan country girl of Act I became the bride of the handsome young millionaire from the city in Act III, jumped over to Cohan *en masse* when he craftily gave them their favorite Cinderella hokum in terms of stage settings by changing the poor orphan into a shabby dry-goods store that came into its brilliant own in the last act or into a down-at-the-heel village that was eventually metamorphosed into a prosperous and lively town whose glittering electric signs and puffing power plants could be seen through the windows up-stage.

### § 43

There has been some agitation recently on the part of the theatrical managers over the alleged influence of sex appeal upon certain of the local dramatic critics. It is claimed that so susceptible are the latter that they will frequently give a so-called good notice to a mediocre young actress with the appeal and will neglect in a proportionate degree a more talented actress who does not happen to possess it. One might perhaps sympathize with the managers if it were not for one thing, to wit, that the mediocre young actress in question was originally, and quite rightly, given her job by the managers themselves for the very

same reason that the critics give her the good notice.

Although it may have little to do with the art of acting, it is none the less regrettably true that an actress with sex appeal is four times in five a more effective actress than her sister who hasn't it. She may not know quite as much about the art of acting as her sister, but in her is born the somewhat more important quality of being able to influence an audience. It is not that the critics prevaricate pleasantly in her behalf; they are actually stimulated and swayed by her where the more talented actress leaves them cold. The whole object of the theatre is to hypnotize and captivate the spectator and auditor by various shifts and stratagems. Surely sex appeal may be said to be one of these. It has its sound place in the theatre, along with pretty scenery and lovely lights and incidental music. There is a deal of nonsense in the agitation of our friends, the managers. No one in all Christendom has ever accused a dramatic critic of being influenced by the sex appeal of an actress playing a great rôle in a great drama. In such a case, he is temporarily blind to sex appeal, whether the actress has it or hasn't it. It is then only the rôle and the play and the actress as actress that concern him. When a critic begins to feel the sex appeal of an actress, you may put it

down for a certainty that there is nothing in the rôle she is playing that he deems worth concerning himself with.

### § 44

A music show is an entertainment in which a performer, when he does not know what else to do, turns a somersault.

### § 45

Almost without exception, the celebrated Parisian music hall actresses have come into fame not by virtue of the possession of any talent, but by virtue of a press-agency that has concerned itself with something wholly dissociated from talent. In Mistinguett's case, it was a pair of legs advertised as the most symmetrical in France. In the case of Gaby Deslys, it was an alleged amour with a king. In Cleo de Mérode's case, it was a coiffure that was alleged to have hidden a missing ear or two. In the instance of Polaire, it was what was reputed to be the homeliest face in the world, and in the instance of Regine Flory, a certain peculiarity in the design of lingerie. So with the others, past and present. What talent these ladies possess or have possessed rests or has rested princi-

pally in the ability to make a striking personality substitute for actual skill and in the further ability to wear several tons of finery without becoming round-shouldered.

### § 46

By way of a substitute for authentic originality, some dramatic authors resort to the familiar dodge of causing certain of their characters to act not in the way they would normally and logically be expected to act but rather in a way that, being the opposite, will surprise the expectations of the audience. This surprise twist, as it is known, is ever the common resort of the unimaginative and uninventive playwright. Unable to draw character that is at once logical and interesting—an achievement that is anything but easy—he seeks to conceal his deficiency in a superficial dramatic hocus-pocus that shall, in the interesting fore-stage prestidigitation of the moment, divert the audience's attention from the disappearance of logic up-stage. The trick, however, though it is usually successful for the moment, generally—save in farce—finds the audience dissatisfied a little while later. An audience may not know logic when it sees it, but it usually knows it when it feels it. It may be casually amused by an arbi-

trary surprise twist of character, but it is seldom persuaded. And a theatre audience, if it is to be successfully cultivated, must always be persuaded before it can be consistently amused.

### § 47

The difference between a great dramatist of sex like Porto-Riche and most other such dramatists is that the emotions of the former are born in the mind where the emotions of the latter are born some fifty degrees south. Drama of truth and force and beauty is the result in the first instance; drama of cheap sentiment or gaudy smut is the result in the second.

### § 48

To remind us of what we have nearly forgotten —that is the purpose of fine drama.

### § 49

In criticism of the drama and the theatre, the critic should always be mindful of the fact that drama is an art of the ages and the theatre the art of an age. The drama is to be criticized from the

viewpoint of the centuries; the theatre is to be criticized from the viewpoint of the present moment.

### § 50

It is frequently said that the American actor cannot play the rôle of a gentleman. There may often be a measure of truth in the charge. But it seems to me that the trouble is just as often on the other foot. The American playwright doesn't seem to be too frequently gifted in writing the rôles of gentlemen.

### § 51

"Molière was a Scandinavian sculptor whose masterpiece, 'Tristan and Isolde,' was hung in the Louvre in 1894," said the jackass.

"I doubt it," replied a bystander.

"Chronic dissenter!" sneered the jackass.

### § 52

We are always hearing of the persistent boy quality in a man that takes him beamingly back to the circus whenever it hits town. This is one of the soupiest pieces of American philosophical

sentimentality. To the average man, the circus is a terrible bore. To sit through it with one of his youngsters is about the toughest proposition he knows.

### § 53

One of the main troubles with the new school of stage production is that so little of it takes place on the stage. The first thing that one of these new-school producing directors does is to take a look at the stage and rack his brains for a way to get rid of as much of it as possible. He begins either by piling it full of steps, and centering his action on the topmost stair, completely out of sight of three-fourths of the audience, or by running planks out into the auditorium and aisles and working up to his dramatic climaxes at the exact moments when the actors will be most likely to bump into the male portion of the audience which is returning somewhat belatedly and uncertainly to its seats from the nearby parlors of alcoholic refreshment. When he goes in for neither of these artistic revolutions, you will generally find him either cutting so many trapdoors in the stage that the latter takes on the appearance of a magnificent Swiss cheese or, in the instance of a musical show, installing so many elevators and rising platforms and causing

them to perform so many monkeyshines that it assumes the aspect of the sea waves in an old Sullivan, Considine and Woods melodrama, the sea in which, as you will remember, was the cloth off a retired billiard table and the waves of which were the Messrs. Sullivan, Considine and Woods rolling around under it.

The first move that the new school of stage production made was to get rid of the footlights. Having got rid of the footlights, it next proceeded to get rid of the bunchlights and borderlights. This done, it got rid of the scenery. The next move was to get rid of the proscenium arch. After this, it got rid of the stage proper. And now it has brilliantly progressed to a point where it has pretty nearly got rid of most of the audience.

#### § 54

The dramatist is a creative artist; the critic is not a creative artist. For example: 1. "Cheaper to Marry," by Samuel Shipman; 2. "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," by John Dryden.

#### § 55

There is no clearer indication of the pervading sentimentality of the American people than the

fact that they demand that the hero of a play always be in love.

### § 56

Like tapestry, drama should not be scrutinized too closely. It should be pondered and criticized at several paces. It is not designed for near consideration; if analytically regarded at short range, its woof and essential crudity dispel its creator's aim. That aim is solely to fashion a thing of suggestive illusion and beauty. The texture and the structure may in the eyes of too nosey criticism be ugly. But if the illusion and the beauty are there, the rest is not the business of criticism.

THE END







